



The
RED CROSS GIRLS

with the
U.S. MARINES

MARGARET VANDERCOOK

2

The Red Cross Girls With the U. S. Marines

By

MARGARET VANDERCOOK

Author of "The Ranch Girls Series," "Stories
about Camp Fire Girls Series," etc.

Illustrated

The John C. Winston Company
Philadelphia

Copyright, 1919, by
THE JOHN C. WINSTON CO.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. A WEDDING.....	7
II. A NEW RED CROSS UNIT.....	25
III. THE DINNER PARTY.....	38
IV. PARIS.....	50
V. A CLOUDLESS NIGHT.....	69
VI. AN OLD CASTLE FORTRESS.....	85
VII. A QUESTION OF TEMPERAMENTS.....	98
VIII. WINGS OF THE MORNING.....	111
IX. TWO FAREWELLS.....	123
X. A WOUNDED OFFICER.....	140
XI. THE RECOVERY.....	151
XII. CHÂTEAU-THIERRY.....	164
XIII. BEFORE THE ATTACK.....	180
XIV. THE ATTACK.....	191
XV. INSIDE THE HOSPITAL.....	204
XVI. A STRANGE MEETING PLACE.....	226
XVII. THE FINALE.....	249

THE RED CROSS GIRLS WITH THE U. S. MARINES

CHAPTER I

A Wedding

AT the "Little Church Around the Corner" the marriage was to be solemnized at four o'clock in the afternoon.

It had been a sultry summer day when ordinarily the downtown streets of New York would have been comparatively deserted. Yet on this afternoon a crowd was gathering on the sidewalk before the famous church.

Elbowing his way in and out among them a policeman appeared cheerful and friendly.

The wedding was to be a military one, and in this greatest military year in human history every human being was expected to show interest in whatever bore the slightest

relation to war. Moreover, this ceremony presented a feature of especial interest.

Two lines of United States marines, in full dress white summer uniforms, standing at attention, formed an aisle from the street to the church door; on their caps and collars was the insignia of their corps, a seal formed of the western hemisphere in fretted silver, with the continents of North and South America in gold and an eagle in silver.

At the present time there were no fighting men who held exactly the same position in the public honor as the United States marines, since for the past few weeks their valor and determination had been exciting the admiration of the allied world.

Several hundred persons had already entered the church, when finally, with as little noise and exciting as little confusion as possible, two automobiles stopped before the entrance.

Descending from one of them came a group of four girls, wearing white organdie gowns and carrying bunches of pink roses; one of the girls must have been about

seventeen, the others were several years older; caught in the lace of each frock was a Red Cross pin.

There was also a woman who appeared to be the center of attention; her costume of heavy, soft white silk; she bore only a few white roses and a prayer book in her hands.

From the second car an older man stepped forth, in the uniform of a surgeon of the marines, accompanied by four younger Marine Corps officers.

A few moments after the wedding party had entered the church, the marriage of Sonya Valesky and Dr. David Clark was being quietly celebrated by the Rev. Howard Courtney, a chaplain in the United States army.

So abruptly had the ceremony been decided upon that there had been but little time for preparation, or even for announcement to their friends. Therefore, it was something of a surprise to observe how many people had managed to be present, particularly at a time of the year when New York is more than half emptied of its fashionable residents.

No one had anticipated more than a simple ceremony, but now during a pause a voice arose among the high arches of the old church singing a wedding anthem, a voice almost overpowering in its unexpected, poignant beauty.

"O Perfect Love, all human thought transcending,
Lowly we kneel in prayer before Thy Throne
That theirs may be the love that knows no ending,
Whom Thou forevermore dost join in one."

The singer could not be seen, and yet scarcely was there a listener unaware he was in the presence of a great artist.

Even the members of the bridal party appeared surprised by the solo, since three of the bridesmaids exchanged quiet, veiled glances, until the continuing beauty of the hymn absorbed their complete attention.

"O Perfect life, be Thou their full assurance
Of tender charity and steadfast faith,
O patient hope and quiet brave endurance,
With childlike faith that fears not pain, nor death.

Grant them the joy which brightens earthly sorrow,
Grant them the peace which calms all earthly strife;
And to life's day the glorious unknown morrow
That dawns upon eternal love and life."

The ceremony concluded, as Sonya passed down the church aisle with her hand on her husband's arm, it seemed to her that never, so long as she lived, could she forget the tremulous beauty and passion of the closing lines of her wedding hymn, the epitome of her future: "the glorious unknown morrow, that dawns upon eternal love and life."

Moreover, Sonya herself had also been amazed by the unlooked for singing of the anthem. So far as she knew there had been no arrangement for music at her wedding, save the organ.

If, afterwards, in silence she asked herself the question of who the singer could be, in her heart she must have known the answer to her own questioning.

However, driving away from the church the four girls who had acted as her bridesmaids discussed the mystery openly.

Of the four, three had been members of the original group of Red Cross nurses who had offered their services to the allied cause soon after the outbreak of the war in Europe. Therefore, before the entry of

their own country into the conflict, they had nursed wounded soldiers in Great Britain, France, Belgium, Italy and Russia, until later their opportunity had come to serve under the Stars and Stripes.

The Red Cross nurses were Nona Davis, Mildred Thornton, and Barbara Thornton, who, having married Mildred's brother, was now Mrs. Richard Thornton. The youngest of the bridesmaids was Bianca Zoli. Half American, half Italian, she had come to the United States on the return of Sonya Valesky and Nona Davis from Italy more than a year before.

As soon as the car had rolled away from the church, Nona turned toward her with an expression of amusement and also of curiosity.

"You must know, Bianca, who it was who sang so exquisitely at Sonya's wedding this afternoon. And yet it seems scarcely necessary to ask you, since it could have been no one save Carlo Navara. The puzzle is: Carlo is presumably on a concert tour in the west and Sonya's decision to be married immediately scarcely allowed her oppor-

tunity to let him hear in time to return to New York. But you and Carlo are such special friends of late, Bianca, do you know if he did come back unexpectedly? And who arranged for him to sing, since some one must have?"

Without an audible reply, Bianca made a pretense of being deeply absorbed by some object she was observing out the car window.

Therefore in her stead Barbara Thornton announced in a tone which betrayed both admiration and annoyance, "Surely, Nona, as you who have known Bianca longer than the rest of us must realize by this time that she has the genius for keeping her own counsel and will never tell what she does not wish to tell. In a way I suppose I envy her. But there is no reason for asking your unnecessary question. No one except Carlo could have sung so exquisitely and with such beautiful melancholy that had I not been a bridesmaid I should have wept. Isn't it too romantic for words, Carlo's appearing in just this fashion at Sonya's wedding after she had

refused to marry him? Oh, why did nothing so enchanting occur at my wedding! If I thought Carlo would sing for me I should try to persuade Dick to marry me over again?"

Although the two older girls laughed at this reflection, Bianca flushed, an unusually warm color spreading over her delicate, clear skin.

"I am sorry not to tell what you ask of me," she answered slowly, "only I promised——"

"You are not to be expected to betray other people's secrets, Bianca," Mildred Thornton replied, coming to the younger girl's rescue with her usual grave kindness.

"Yet isn't it strange that Sonya Valesky seems to have made such a suitable marriage after her adventurous history? Dr. Clark is older than she and one of the most prominent surgeons in the United States. He must have possessed a good deal of influence over Sonya, else he would never have been able to persuade her to marry him so soon after their engagement."

More than any one of the four girls,

Nona Davis shared the confidence of the friend whose marriage they were at present discussing, possessing also a stronger tie of personal affection.

Now she hesitated and then said with a certain embarrassment:

"But I don't believe Sonya married Dr. Clark after so short an acquaintance merely because he so much wished it. The fact is she had no idea of marrying soon after her engagement, having known Dr. Clark only the brief time they were upon the hospital ship, *Consolation*, and during the short voyage home after the sinking of the *Consolation*. The truth is I think she hurried her marriage for our sakes as well as her own and Dr. Clark's. All of us so much wanted to go back to Europe immediately to continue our Red Cross nursing. And of course nothing could be so worth while as to be in Dr. Clark's Marine Hospital near Château-Thierry. You know he was given charge of this hospital and appointed Surgeon of the Marines by the President, because there was no other American hospital ship of which he could take command.

Think of our working together and in the neighborhood of Château-Thierry! Fortunately Dr. Clark was able to obtain special permission from the United States government for Sonya to work in the hospital with him. Ordinarily it is against the government's regulations for a wife to be in France when her husband is in active service, but because Sonya was a Red Cross nurse and had been doing war work before her marriage an exception was made in her case."

As the only one of the group of girls who was married, Barbara Thornton smiled in response to Nona's long speech.

"Oh well, Nona, it really is not worth while to explain Sonya's self-sacrifice so thoroughly. I did not serve on the hospital ship with Dr. Clark as the rest of you did, and yet I have an idea he is in the habit of having people do as he tells them. Truly, I rejoice to have the opportunity to work with him. My family seem to agree that I may be more useful for the next few months nursing in France, now the need for nurses is so great, than in helping to

care for my baby with his grandparents and his own nurse to disapprove of most of my ideas. But perhaps we had better talk of something else than our Red Cross work at Sonya's wedding reception, difficult as it is to think of any other subject."

By this time their automobile having reached its destination, the girls found Sonya and her husband already arrived and waiting in their drawing-room to receive their guests.

Janet Perry and Louise Roberts, who also had acted as Red Cross nurses aboard the *Consolation*, had come in a few moments earlier, accompanied by the Rev. Howard Courtney, whose engagement to Janet Perry had been announced shortly after their rescue at sea and return to their home in Philadelphia.

A great many guests were not expected at Sonya's reception although the number of invitations had been increased beyond her original desire. Her own friends in New York were limited in number. However, she had begun at once to learn at least one of the difficulties of being the

wife of a distinguished man. Dr. Clark not only had an extraordinary number of personal friends, but his professional associations appeared unlimited and his recent prominence in the medical department of war service had added a number of officers and their families to his list of acquaintances.

This afternoon as Sonya received the congratulations of her guests the thought was often in her mind that she had married into a more conventional world than she had known since her early girlhood in Russia.

Once she had the opportunity to whisper to her husband: "Do you suppose if your friends had any idea that I was once a Russian Socialist they would be kind to me now? I hope, for your sake, I may prove fairly acceptable."

But before Dr. Clark could answer this confidence he and Sonya had both observed Miss Blackstone coming forward to speak to them.

She had been a nurse in one of the hospitals of which Dr. Clark was a director and afterwards the superintendent of nurses

on board the United States hospital ship, *Consolation*.

If she and Sonya had not been friendly, and if Sonya had reason to believe Miss Blackstone was not pleased by her marriage, there was nothing in their greeting of each other to indicate any lack of cordiality.

Later the little drawing-room became so crowded that it was with difficulty the guests could reach their host and hostess. However, as the Red Cross girls were assisting with the receiving, they managed to make people known to one another. Only Bianca considered herself too shy for this responsibility, in spite of the fact that her home was with Sonya and she was under her guardianship.

A little weary from the excitement of the day, and seeing so many strangers, after about half an hour in the drawing-room Bianca slipped into a small corridor which led from the dining-room into an adjoining pantry, presuming that no one would be there except the maids who were serving refreshments.

Therefore she was started when almost

immediately a voice pronounced her name.

"Bianca," the voice murmured a little hoarsely.

The next instant Bianca discovered the figure of Carlo Navara concealed in the semi-obscurity of the pantry. He was a tall, slender young fellow with dark eyes and hair, who today was wearing a somewhat travel-stained costume and had an air of artistic dishevelment.

Bianca gazed at him with conflicting expressions of affection and annoyance.

"Really, Carlo, you assured me that there was nothing on the face of the earth that would induce you to see Sonya after her marriage," she protested, "but if you have changed your mind why do you hide here as if you were a criminal instead of appearing with Sonya's other friends? You told me you only wished to offer her the tribute of your singing and then you wanted to disappear out of her life forever. I declare I scarcely know what you ought to do. I have not told Sonya you were in New York as you asked me to keep your secret, besides you cannot go in to speak

to her and Dr. Clark among so many strangers, looking as you do at present."

For once Bianca Zoli was so moved out of her characteristic calm and self-possession that her companion appeared slightly abashed.

"But I don't wish to speak to Sonya," he apologized. "I want you to keep your promise. Never tell her I sang at her wedding and that you made the necessary arrangements for me. I do not wish to see Sonya again now she has married a man whom she has known only a few weeks rather than accept my devotion. But I did wish to speak to you, Bianca, that is why I have been waiting here in hiding. I came to say good-by as I am sailing for France almost immediately. Yes, I know I was declared physically unfit for the service after being wounded in Italy, but recently I have become much stronger. At least I have enlisted in the Marines and passed the physical test. As my previous experience in fighting in Italy serves instead of the ordinary training I am expecting to be sent abroad very shortly. You have been

awfully kind to me, Bianca, and if we do not meet again——”

Bianca sighed.

“It seems to me you are always saying farewell, Carlo. I don’t see why we should not meet again, except that you always feel sure you are going to disappear forever. I suppose you have given up all thought of your musical career and canceled your contracts. I presume you won’t even try to become a great singer.”

“No, not until the war is over and the Allies have won,” Carlo answered quietly, suddenly losing the dramatic manner of the past few moments and looking as deeply and steadfastly in earnest as if he had not been afflicted or inspired by the possession of an artistic temperament.

“You see the war has not spared other artists, Bee dear. Good-by.”

Later, refusing all Bianca’s persuasions that he stay and see other of his friends, or have something to eat, even if he declined to look upon Sonya because of his romantic devotion, Carlo withdrew.

Afterwards, a little shaken by their

tempestuous meeting and parting, Bianca felt it her duty to return to the drawing-room for fear her disappearance might be discovered.

Yet, since she still felt no desire to talk she found herself a quiet corner where she could stand, half hidden from observation by a curtain.

And, alone, Bianca discussed with herself the problem which had puzzled her for some time. Did Carlo Navara really care so much for Sonya, a woman so much older than himself, that her marriage to other than he would really spoil his life? He had so often assured her of this fact.

But then Carlo changed his point of view about other things so why not about this? In the old days when he was fighting in Italy he seemed to have a horror of a soldier's life, while now he was rushing into it as if he dearly loved the struggle.

Bianca's meditation finally was interrupted by observing two guests standing close beside her, evidently strangers. One was a tall, dark girl with a vivid face and brilliant dark eyes, the other her brother, smaller and less interesting looking.

Realizing that it was her duty to speak to them, Bianca began somewhat timidly.

"You are friends of Dr. Clark's? I wonder if you would not like something to eat? Won't you let me get it for you?"

The girl shook her head.

"No, please talk instead. I don't know Dr. Clark, at least not personally, although I hope to very soon. But my mother and father knew Mrs. Clark, oh, years ago in Russia. We know very few persons in New York."

But here Bianca's good intentions were frustrated. Observing that Sonya was leaving the room and must be intending to put on her traveling dress, Bianca slipped away, Sonya having made her promise to be with her when the moment arrived for starting upon her wedding journey.

CHAPTER II

A New Red Cross Unit

THE left wing of the new New York City Hospital had been devoted to Red Cross uses since the early days of the war. Indeed, many months before the entry of the United States into the great conflict, volunteer units had been formed here and gone forth to work in nearly every allied country in Europe.

On the morning following Sonya's and Dr. Clark's hurried wedding, Nona Davis and Mildred Thornton walked together across Central Park toward the hospital on the opposite side of the city. They expected to conclude certain final arrangements before the sailing of their hastily organized Red Cross unit for service behind an American sector in France, a call having come from across the sea for more and more nurses and physicians. Now, owing to the fact that this new unit was to be under

Dr. David Clark's command and that he and Sonya were allowing themselves a brief honeymoon, there were a number of messages and directions which the two girls had been asked to deliver.

It was a brilliant summer day in, perhaps, the most famous summer in the history of the world; a summer which continued unusually cool in the eastern part of the United States.

Both Red Cross girls wore light muslin dresses and looked extremely well. One would scarcely have realized that they had recently passed through so dangerous an experience as the sinking of a hospital ship in which they had been acting as nurses.

Hearing the noise of an airplane overhead, Mildred paused for a moment. The machine was swooping so low that it created an instant of suspense; then the aviator arose, soaring across the lake as if he were a gigantic, startled waterfowl.

"I shall be sorry, Nona, when the day arrives and we shall no longer be sufficiently interested in airplanes to stop to look at them. But I suppose after the war

they will become so numerous one will scarcely be able to take the time. Some day I hope I may cross the ocean in an airplane, indeed I wish the day were at hand. At present we need wings in order to reach France in time. Thank fate we are sailing in a few days!" Mildred Thornton remarked, while conscious of the conflicting emotions in her companion's face.

"Yet for the first time in the four years of my Red Cross nursing I would prefer to stay at home rather than do my work," Nona answered. "I might as well confess the truth, Mildred, if Captain Martin were willing we should be married, I would marry him at once and stay here to care for him. Yet I thought the war had taught me to be impersonal in my desire to help: It is a difficult lesson for a woman to learn, is it not, to prefer to devote herself to the person she loves best instead of the many who may also need her aid?"

Neither from Sonya nor Mildred Thornton had Nona Davis made any attempt to conceal her attachment to Captain John

Martin, nor her determination to marry him in spite of the misfortune of his blindness, which had been his portion of the tragedy of war.

Long ago when Nona Davis and Jack Martin were little more than children, they had known each other in the old city of Charleston, South Carolina, which was Nona's first home. The war had brought a second meeting, when Jack Martin, then a lieutenant, had been among the first of the American troops to arrive in France.

Located for training in a French village near the hospital where Nona was nursing at the time, she had taken care of the young officer after his first injury. But in those days Nona had not returned Lieutenant Martin's affection.

Had her love been of slow and silent growth or had it come with the rush of a full stream at their unexpected meeting aboard the hospital ship, when Nona had found her former friend robbed of his youth and perhaps compelled to walk in darkness for the rest of his life? Well, whatever the method, Nona believed that she loved the

man the war had made. Captain Martin had not only proved himself an officer of rare courage and ability at a moment of peril, but since had revealed the same qualities of heroism and endurance. Surely to accept blindness without bitterness or lamentation is to be in truth a hero!

"You will go with me to see Jack after we have finished our visit at the hospital?" Nona asked a little unsteadily. "I believe I will make one more appeal to him before our separation. Can you understand, Mildred, why if I am able to accept Jack's blindness, convinced I will be happier with him under any circumstances than with any one else, why he refuses to consider our marriage? Do you suppose he really does not care for me? But after all why should I trouble you with this questioning? You will be able to hear Jack and me argue the question quite openly this afternoon. I seem to have not the least shyness or hesitation. Oh, if I only possessed your beautiful patience and self-control, Mildred! I have been so angry with Jack recently that several times I have threatened to give him

up altogether, although I have had no idea of keeping my word."

"You are too impatient for your happiness, Nona," Mildred answered. "Captain Martin has only asked you to wait so that you could test your own feeling. It is natural under the circumstances that he should fear it to be pity rather than love. I suppose Sonya's marriage has made you a bit envious. But then Sonya will see little enough of Dr. Clark after we arrive at the new hospital in France. As a matter of fact she is not even crossing in the same boat with him, as this would represent a breach of naval etiquette. I hope the new Red Cross nurses to whom we are to be introduced will not keep us waiting, so that we may have time for your call on Captain Martin and still reach home tonight for mother's dinner party. Janet Perry and Louise Roberts have promised to be prompt and one can always count upon Miss Blackstone. Have you any idea how many nurses are to be in our new unit?"

Nona shook her head. "I am not sure. Other nurses and assistants will be added

to Dr. Clark's staff after we reach France. We shall be in the thick of the fight you know, in the neighborhood of Château-Thierry and near Belleau Wood where our marines are even now doing such extraordinary fighting. Indeed we shall be in so great danger that after their marriage Dr. Clark even urged Sonya to change her mind and not to accompany him. But of course she refused. However, Dr. Clark has been wise in asking Miss Blackstone to act as superintendent of nurses, in spite of the fact that she and Sonya do not particularly like each other. But Sonya has really not had sufficient experience as a nurse to undertake serious responsibility. However, she is perfectly aware of this fact.

By this time the two friends, having crossed the park, were entering the arched doorway of the hospital.

Inside the small reception room they discovered a number of other persons deep in important consultations. In the larger room beyond, which opened into the reception room, they could see more than a hundred women and girls engaged in making bandages and other hospital supplies.

Finding a corner where they could be as much out of the way as possible, Mildred and Nona sat down to await Miss Blackstone.

In spite of their familiarity with the same character of scene, Nona and Mildred watched the Red Cross workers with unflagging interest. Many of the girls and women looked extraordinarily handsome; never had they looked so beautiful in elaborate costumes as in their white caps and gowns, glorified by the Red Cross symbol of service.

When Miss Blackstone joined them she asked them into a less crowded apartment where they found Janet Perry, Louise Roberts and two other new Red Cross nurses.

One of them was a tall girl with light reddish hair, a warm ruddy skin and shining brown eyes. She had wide hips and a full deep chest.

Observing Miss Blackstone hesitating over her name as she attempted to introduce her, the girl laughed good naturedly, revealing strong white teeth a little distance apart.

"If Miss Blackstone is embarrassed to tell you my name, I had best spare her by confessing it. My name is Wilhelmina Jones, but please remember that Wilhelmina is Dutch, not German, and Jones a most respectable English name. You don't realize how I have been longing to undertake the Red Cross nursing in Europe ever since the war began. Now when I believe victory is soon to be ours I am to have my chance."

The other girl, Laura Hope, was a wealthy New York girl and a friend of Mildred Thornton's.

But there was still the seventh girl who had not yet made her appearance. Miss Blackstone glanced several times toward the door, making no effort to conceal her impatience. Having promised to introduce to one another the girls who were to form a part of her nursing staff in France, she was prepared to do her duty, but a hundred tasks were awaiting her and she had no time to waste upon unpunctuality.

She was about to withdraw leaving the six girls to talk over future plans together,

when there was a light knock at the door and the seventh girl entered the small apartment.

She was dressed in a thin black dress, a large black hat, shabby and almost entirely without trimming, and yet there was something about the girl oddly conspicuous and arresting. She was very slender, with dark hair and eyes and bright red lips.

An instant Nona Davis and Mildred Thornton exchanged puzzled glances, for somewhere they remembered, or thought they remembered, having seen the newcomer before today.

She was evidently an acquaintance of Miss Blackstone's and probably had made application for the Red Cross nursing abroad through the well-known older woman.

It was the girl herself who soon relieved Nona's and Mildred's curiosity.

"I did not meet you yesterday, but my brother and I were guests at the wedding reception. My family knew Mrs. Clark long ago in Russia, although my brother and I are Americans. My name is Anne Karen.

I have been doing Red Cross work on the East Side of New York City for the past two years. Now at last I hope to be able to help in Europe before the war is over!"

Seating herself in a chair next Mildred Thornton, Anne Karen talked little during the long discussion and exchange of plans and ideas which followed among the other girls. Since they were not to meet again until their ship sailed for France, several hours passed before they finally separated.

After lunching together Nona Davis, accompanied by Mildred Thornton, drove to Captain Martin's hotel. He was not ill but instead had to endure the greater tragedy of blindness.

The two girls found him in a chair by an open window which looked down on Fifth Avenue. The famous Avenue of the Allies was never so beautiful and brilliant as in those days of war. It was aflame with the flags of the great democratic nations of the world and thronging with their peoples.

To Mildred Thornton, Captain Martin looked infinitely pathetic, as he rose and extending both hands came groping toward them.

He was so young already to have heavy lines in his fine, clear-cut face, and gray in his dark hair.

Yet he had at the moment no expression of sorrow in his face, as he turned from greeting Nona to shake hands with her friend.

After arriving in New York, Captain Martin had secured the services of a man, a private soldier who had been honorably discharged from the army because of an injury, but who had sufficiently recovered to be able to look after him. As he was expecting Mildred's and Nona's visit he had sent the man out upon an errand.

As soon as she reasonably could, Mildred slipped over to the opposite side of the room. There, taking up a book, she tried to devote her attention to it thus leaving Nona and Captain Martin free to have their talk together as unaffected by her presence as possible.

Nevertheless, she could not avoid the impression that the tones of Nona's voice were pleading and sweet. Strange that Captain Martin could resist her desire to

marry him and face with him whatever the future might hold. If he were to continue blind always, or if he were to recover, Nona believed herself prepared to meet the issue.

However, he must have remained firm for in a little less than an hour Nona rose.

"Come, Mildred, it is time we were saying good-by," she said. "Jack is obdurate, he refuses me again. I suppose he does not love me enough to have faith in me."

Then something in the swift change in the young officer's expression altered the girl's mood. Her eyes filled with tears.

"I suppose I am not fair, dear," she whispered, a little under her breath. "But I shall do my best, I shall try to 'carry on,' as you have asked me, the cause that is dearer to you than life. Yet I am a poor substitute for you in the great work in France.

Groping for Nona's hand and finding it Captain Martin raised it to his lips.

Whatever his reply, Mildred turned away so that she could not overhear.

CHAPTER III

The Dinner Party

ALITTLE after seven o'clock on that same evening, at her summer home on Long Island, Mildred Thornton came down stairs late to dinner. She and Nona Davis had taken a train out from town an hour or more before.

Mildred was sorry they were to have guests as she had so little time to spend with her family. Indeed for the past four years since she began her Red Cross nursing in Europe, she had seldom been at home, except for one brief visit when she rested, presumably on the verge of a nervous breakdown from overwork.

These past few days had been an unexpected gift, due to the sinking of their hospital ship, making a return voyage on board impossible.

Just outside the drawing-room door Mildred paused for an instant unobserved,

gazing in on the scene. It was difficult after four years near the allied battle-fronts, where she had witnessed so much of tragedy and heroism, to adjust her mind to the fact that life in the United States was going on in much the same fashion.

Her mother was still giving dinner parties; they were simple parties compared to the former ones, with only a few neighbors and friends for guests. But tonight Mildred thought the big open drawing-room looked very lovely. There were flowers everywhere from the garden outdoors, summer lilies in great jars and baskets and bowls of freshly cut roses.

Her father was standing near a table talking to their next-door neighbor and also a young officer in the uniform of the United States Marines.

Judge Thornton had been spending the greater part of his time in Washington, giving his legal services to the government. The news of the sinking of the hospital ship, upon which his daughter was nursing had brought him hurriedly back to New York in time to hear of her rescue and to greet her upon her return.

It seemed to Mildred that her father looked a good deal older, but four years is apt to make a noticeable change, and never were there four years in which human hearts and minds had suffered the same strain and sorrow.

Slipping quietly into the room, Mildred, in her old childish fashion came at once and stood beside her father, as if demanding his affectionate protection. Naturally the four years of her Red Cross nursing had altered Mildred Thornton in many ways, yet she had never recovered from her former shyness in the presence of strangers.

In one moment she had shaken hands with her neighbor and been congratulated on her escape from the submarine disaster, the next she was introduced to the young officer who, chancing to be his guest overnight, had been invited in informal fashion to dine with the Thorntons.

Mrs. Thornton had been waiting for Mildred's appearance. She now gave the signal for dinner. In spite of there being nearly a dozen persons present, they entered the dining-room without ceremony, finding

their places through the cards that lay next their plates.

As a courtesy to the young officer, Mildred found herself placed beside him as she was the daughter of the house.

Nevertheless, Mildred felt a little sinking of the heart. Actually she was too tired to make sufficient effort to be even reasonably agreeable, after the excitement of Sonya's wedding the day before and all that she and Nona had been through since.

What a mistake for her mother not to have chosen Nona Davis, or her sister-in-law, Barbara, for the officer's dinner companion! If Nona were weary and under a severe strain at parting from Captain Martin, nevertheless Mildred believed she was looking pretty enough to be forgiven anything. She was sitting opposite, a few places further down the table and in a light green muslin dress with her pale yellow hair coiled close to her head; Mildred thought she suggested a yellow lily.

Then Barbara was unfailingly fascinating to men. At the present moment the two elderly gentlemen on either side of her were

laughing at her latest speech. Even if her beloved husband, Richard Thornton, were away in France, having sailed only a short time before, Barbara could not remain forever cheerless. In spite of the fact that Mrs. Thornton originally had been opposed to the young western girl's marriage to her son, Mildred realized that Barbara's social gifts were now an unfailing source of satisfaction to her mother.

Unfortunately Mildred herself was not pretty in an accepted fashion, perhaps she was too grave and colorless for so young a girl. Always serious by nature the experiences of the past few years had not been cheerful ones. Yet Mildred had wonderful hair of a singularly soft light shade bound tonight in wide even braids about her head and her eyes were clear and beautiful in their expression even if her nose and mouth were both irregular.

About her there was also a poise and dignity, a kind of spiritual restfulness, of which the young officer was immediately aware.

He scarcely wished to make the confes-

sion even to himself, nevertheless for the past few weeks people had been almost too kind and attentive.

Undoubtedly it was a relief to feel he was not expected to be flirtatious with the girl beside him, and most girls did expect this attitude from a soldier. However, Lieutenant Wainwright had been told by his host of Mildred Thornton's former engagement to a distinguished Russian general and of General Alexis' death after the fall of the Czar. Under the circumstances it was natural he should believe Mildred's gravity to be the result of this experience.

Yet finally when she turned to say something to him of a simple character, he found himself staring more fixedly than was courteous.

"This is a stupid speech, Miss Thornton, nevertheless tonight I believe it a true one. I think we have met somewhere before."

But Mildred shook her head.

"I am sorry, you must be mistaken, else I feel sure I should have remembered."

Then the young officer said suddenly:

"Now I do remember, we have not met before, but you are the girl of the necklace."

"I am afraid I don't understand you."

The young officer laughed.

"No, I suppose not; I must explain to you. I have been in a camp near New York City since last April waiting each day for my orders to sail. In May, during a Red Cross drive, I saw you take a necklace from your throat and drop it into the United States flag which you were carrying with three other girls to receive contributions. Now do you remember?"

Mildred's interest was spontaneous.

"Yes, and you are the officer who simply by looking at me made me realize what a conspicuous thing I had done. Ordinarily I am not an impulsive person."

But Mildred Thornton did not explain what her action had really represented. In casting away the chain she felt that she had cast away the symbol of her engagement, for the chain had been presented her by General Alexis in Russia and she had worn it instead of a ring. Now General Alexis was dead and the old

Russia was no more. In spite of certain democratic principles, undoubtedly the great soldier had also been the faithful soldier and servant of the late Czar. And in her heart Mildred was devoutly thankful to have escaped, although by no act of her own, from the life General Alexis must have offered her. He was so much older and moreover, with such different views, what congeniality could there have been between them?

Anxious now to change the current of her own thought Mildred said:

"As you are a member of the United States Marine Corps I wonder if you will forgive my ignorance and answer a few questions? Since the war so many of us have pretended to know certain facts of which we were ignorant but tonight I shall not try to pretend. You see I have been in Europe almost ever since the war began and so know less of the military affairs of my own country than I like. Will you tell me the history of the Marine Corps and how they differ from the regular army and navy? They seem to be the most amazing fighters."

Lieutenant Wainwright gave an audible sigh of satisfaction.

Here at last was a girl who appeared anxious to talk upon the one subject which interested him.

"I think a good many people don't know the history of the Marine Corps unless they have taken the trouble to find out. Of course, I mean persons not associated with military life. I did not know a great deal myself when I volunteered a little more than a year ago and now I am convinced I belong to the greatest branch of the service. Where do you wish me to begin? As far back as November 10, 1775, the Continental Congress authorized the creation of two battalions of marines and I believe we have played a part in every war the United States has engaged in since. But I don't wish to talk like a schoolmaster. You surely know all this."

Mildred shook her head.

"If I ever knew I have forgotten. I know you are called the soldier-sailors. But I am especially interested because I am sailing in a few days to join a hospital

staff in the neighborhood of Château-Thierry where large numbers of our marines are in the fighting line."

To Mildred's surprise her companion suddenly appeared extremely unhappy.

Answering her unspoken inquiry, Lieutenant Wainwright explained:

"It is only that I am envying those fellows over there who have been in the thick of the fight recently, while I am cooling my heels here at home waiting for my opportunity to join them. God knows they must be needing fresh troops. But I am sailing at last. In fact this is my last night from camp before we expect to get away. Once in France I shall do my best to make up for what seems like lost time."

"Is this summer to mean victory for us?" Mildred inquired. "It looked so desperate for the Allies this spring, but now at last General Foch has the supreme command. Yet still we wait for his great counter-attack. Perhaps it may take place after our arrival in France," Mildred said smiling and yet the least little bit in earnest.

"Anyhow I trust you may have your opportunity. I can realize just how hard it must have been for you to be kept here at home when your own branch of the service is doing such wonderful work."

Now to Mildred's surprise she discovered that dinner was nearly over and that she had failed to address a single word to the guest seated on her other side.

After a few moments of attention to him, her mother gave the signal for the women to leave the dining-room.

It was not until their guests were about to leave that Mildred had another moment alone with Lieutenant Wainwright. Then he found her to say good-night.

"Won't you come out with me for a moment on the veranda?" he urged. "I think I should like to say good-night and have you wish me good luck out there."

It was a June night with the moon shining calm and resplendent in a clear sky. Over the smooth green lawn there was a carpet of light, with only here and there a shadow.

"Isn't it beautiful and serene out here?"

Mildred murmured. "Thank you for suggesting that we see it together. I hope this scene may sink deep in my memory. Perhaps we may both like to think of it when we are compelled to look upon such different sights."

The young officer extended his hand.

"Perhaps we may meet each other in France. After all we have come together most unexpectedly and recalled our original view of each other."

Mildred smiled.

"It would be a pleasure. But let us at least wish for each other that we may both live up to the motto of your Marine Corps, *semper fidelis*, ever faithful."

The young officer lifted his cap and he and Mildred stood together bareheaded in the moonlight, both of them looking up toward the sky.

"*Semper fidelis*," the marine officer repeated, and was gone.

CHAPTER IV

Paris

IN the unforgettable days of the summer of 1918, Paris was under continuous bombardment from the long-range German guns; nevertheless the ordinary life of the city went on in much its usual fashion.

One morning in the gray dawn a railroad train entering the Gare du Nord deposited a crowd of passengers at the station, among them a group of American girls in the uniforms of Red Cross nurses.

The arrival of American Red Cross workers in Paris had grown too frequent an event to create special attention. These were welcomed by the proper officials and then placed in taxis they were driven to the Hotel Florence, a small pension hotel in the neighborhood of the famous old church, the Madeleine.

In their room at the Florence, Sonya

Valesky, who was now Mrs. David Clark, Nona Davis and Bianca Zoli had barely sufficient time to remove their wraps before a knock at the door announced that the usual first French breakfast of coffee and rolls was about to be served.

Nevertheless Sonya flung herself down on the bed to rest, while Nona received the little maid who was carrying the heavy breakfast tray. A few moments later, after bringing Sonya her breakfast, Bianca climbed up on the bed beside her with her own tray.

At the same time, opening the door between their adjoining rooms, Mildred and Barbara Thornton appeared to sit down at the table with Nona in order that they might eat together.

The girls talked together, discussing their latest journey across the Atlantic, but Sonya for a little while only watched them in silence.

Then she said with the smile which made her face particularly charming.

"Do you know, children, there have been moments recently when it becomes difficult

for me to remember that I am at last a married woman? To have remained unmarried so long and then to enjoy one's husband's society only a few days before he leaves to join his ship is a little confusing. Besides, I have grown so accustomed in the last few years to regarding myself as a kind of adopted mother to you Red Cross girls, that it is almost impossible to think of myself in any other light. However, I don't intend to resign my responsibility altogether even if I have assumed a new one."

Nona laughed, holding her big French coffee cup poised in the air for an instant before placing it to her lips.

"Sonya, really, we are grateful for your devotion, but I have never been under the impression that you were entitled to the full dignity you assume. After all you are not so very many years older than the rest of us, save Bianca of course. Bully Bianca as much as you like under the impression that you are her adopted mother, but, please, not us."

In order to soften Nona's speech, Barbara

flung a crimson rose across the room which fell beside Sonya.

In spite of the fact that at the present time her husband, Richard Thornton, was a number of miles from Paris and devoting nearly every waking hour of his life to the service of the wounded, he had managed to have a box of flowers waiting for his wife on her arrival in Paris.

"But we are grateful to you and to fate just the same, Sonya. It is hard on you to have been forced to travel to France with us instead of your husband, but I presume Dr. Clark's ship will arrive in another day or so," Barbara remarked sympathetically, insisting upon assuming that as she was the only other married person in their party there was a particular understanding between herself and Sonya.

"I mean to try to find out as much as I can today," Sonya returned. "It seems strange that a battleship should require a longer time to cross than our own transport. But at least we can have a day to see Paris, because as soon as Dr. Clark arrives we shall leave immediately for the hospital.

There is such great need of hospitals now in the American sectors. Would you girls rather remain indoors because of the danger from the long-range German guns? You might be safer indoors. I am told the explosions occur every few hours, although with no degree of certainty."

Shrugging her shoulders in Italian fashion, in spite of her effort in the past year to become wholly an American, Bianca Zoli replied:

"Don't you think, Sonya dear, it would be absurd for us to take shelter and hide ourselves in Paris because we were in dread of an occasional far-off gun fire, when we are planning to go almost up to the firing line? As this is my first visit to Paris I am anxious to see as much as possible. If you think you will be sufficiently rested may I tell the other girls we will start out in half an hour?"

After Sonya had nodded acquiescence, Bianca disappeared. Louise Roberts and Janet Perry were occupying a third room and the three other new nurses a fourth room on the opposite side of the hall.

Yet a moment after Bianca had departed on her mission, Sonya sighed. She was thinking that Bianca had looked very young and sweet and fragile for the labor and tragedy she was so soon to witness, even to play her small part in.

I wonder, girls, if you will do me a favor?" she asked soon after. "You understand that I never have approved of Bianca's sharing in our Red Cross work in Europe. She is too young and too untrained in many ways, yes, and I must tell the truth, neither physically nor perhaps morally strong enough for the tests and strain which may lie in wait for her. I want you to help me look after her if the occasion should arise and you have the opportunity. I shall not be able to give Bianca the care I have tried to bestow upon her since I accepted her guardianship on leaving Italy. At present I am not sure how much time and energy may be required of a wife. However, I shall probably continue to see as little of my husband after we reach his new hospital as I have ever since our marriage. Yet I know I am fortunate to have been allowed

to come to Europe at all, with my husband in the government service. As you know, the usual rule was set aside in my case because I formerly had been engaged in Red Cross nursing."

"I promise, Sonya, with the greatest pleasure," Barbara Thornton returned. "I remember in the early days of our Red Cross nursing, which after all began less than four years ago, although it now seems half a lifetime, that Eugenia Castaigne used always to be having to rescue me from difficulties. Yet I was a good deal older than Bianca and a full-fledged Red Cross nurse. I wonder if we will be able to see Gene and her husband, Captain Castaigne, before we return home? From Eugenia's last letter she says Captain Castaigne's memory is completely restored and he is so much better of his wound that he is able to help her at her hospital. I say Gene's hospital, because it was largely her money which built and equipped it. Her's was one of the first of the American hospitals in France, although I don't believe Gene wishes it spoken of in this fashion. Remem-

ber, Nona and Mildred, that we used to think Eugenia so very poor in the beginning of our acquaintance because she would never spend a dollar on herself?"

Both girls nodded.

"It seems amazing that Captain Castaigne is willing to do almost the work of a hospital orderly, after being one of the most gifted officers in the French army," Mildred added. "However, his is just one other example of the heroic French spirit in this war, which I shall never forget as long as I live. Whatever the loss, whatever the sacrifice, *C'est toujours la France!*"

A little later in the morning Sonya and the group of younger women, whom she was at present chaperoning, were added to the crowd in the Paris streets, for Paris was crowded as never before in her dramatic history.

Besides the Parisians themselves, even at this early hour the streets were filled with officers and soldiers of many nations; there were also British and American Y. M. C. A. workers and members of every branch of the Red Cross service. Now and

then one saw a blind, or convalescent soldier being escorted by a friend for a breath of morning air and exercise.

Sonya walked ahead, keeping Nona Davis and Bianca close beside her as the two girls were closest in her affection.

By chance there had been no long-distance firing since their arrival, although almost continuously one could hear the far-off low rumble of the battle, which now, without ceasing, was being fought not fifty miles away.

As the Madeleine is one of the perfect churches of Paris and one of the most exquisite buildings in the world and as it was not far from their hotel, the newcomers to Paris went there first. Afterwards they discovered that the statues of the Saints had been removed to some place of greater safety and that the church was protected as much as possible. Yet at all hours the doors stood open for service.

Entering, Sonya and the girls found that there were many other persons inside the church and at prayer and that the greater number were women in black.

Already Sonya had made one discovery of a conspicuous difference in the old Paris she remembered and the Paris of the present time.

In the past the women had worn the gay colors in Paris and the men the sober black and gray, but the war had come to alter this, until now the men were robed in uniforms of many different colors while the women wore the habiliments of sorrow.

Of the members of this particular group of Red Cross workers only Sonya and Bianca had been educated as Catholics, Bianca in Italy and Sonya as a Russian Catholic before she departed from the family tradition. Nevertheless, today they all knelt together before the same altar since in these tragic times no one dared miss an opportunity for prayer.

It occurred to Nona Davis, who had been nursing in France more continuously than the other girls, that differences in religious faith no longer divided men and women as they once had done, any more than differences of nationality, now they had become united against a common enemy.

As they were leaving the church together Nona whispered this opinion to Sonya.

After reporting at the proper Red Cross headquarters and being informed that they were free to amuse themselves for the day, Sonya and her group of American girls lunched at Duval's, one of the many famous and inexpensive restaurants of Paris, finding the food cheaper and better than in New York City for the same price. Then mounting a bus, which boasted a girl conductor and motorman, they drove to the Luxembourg on the opposite side of the city.

The great art gallery of the Louvre had been closed for many months, but the more modern gallery of the Luxembourg continued open. Many of the great paintings had been sent across the sea to the United States for exhibition. However, there remained a sufficient number to interest the thousands of soldiers and civilians, who were sojourning for the first time in the beautiful city.

After Sonya had found a seat on a small park bench in the Luxembourg gardens, adjoining the gallery, the beauty and com-

parative serenity of Paris after four long years of agony and renunciation struck her with fresh amazement.

For the present the group of Red Cross workers had separated. Nona Davis, Bianca Zoli, Anne Karen and Mildred Thornton had remained in the garden to rest for a time before visiting the gallery, while the other five girls had gone inside to look at the pictures.

Yet for the moment Sonya was alone. Nona and Mildred were occupying another bench a few spaces away, Bianca and Anne Karen were wandering about studying the pieces of sculpture which still stood in the gardens.

The afternoon was warm, sultry and heavy, as if the smoke of the battles raging so close hung overhead like a pall.

Indeed Sonya's impression at this moment was that Paris was like a woman, beautiful and gay in spirit, wrapped in a veil which dimmed but did not totally obscure her loveliness.

For instance the Luxembourg gardens were as she always recalled them in a

mental image. Here were the same formal beds of flowers, the same straight vistas down the broad paths, the light dust over the half-dried grass. Here were the little groups of French children at play with their "*bonnes*" sitting near them, knitting and calling to them between stitches. Only today the greater number of the children were in mourning, the little girls in straight conventional French frocks, the poorer boys of the Latin quarters in bloomers, the bourgeois in black coats and short knee-trousers.

Since their arrival in Paris at dawn there had been only two explosions from the long-distance guns and these at some distance away, so that neither Sonya nor her companions were aware of any particular nervousness, although of course unconsciously they were under the strain that possessed every human being near the firing line in France.

Yet here in the peaceful gardens Sonya remembered how upon Easter Sunday not many weeks before, firing from the forest of St. Gobain, the long-range guns had

killed seventy-five persons kneeling in prayer in the church of St. Gervais.

With this thought in mind Sonya glanced a little apprehensively toward Bianca and Anne Karen who were strolling about the gardens together, though not far away. One might be philosophical about oneself, yet it was difficult to feel in the same way about a group of young girls and especially one so young as Bianca.

Sonya had noticed that during their voyage across the Atlantic together, Anne Karen had made a special effort to make friends with Bianca, and also that Bianca had received her advances with the strange little air of aloofness which was inherent in her and which only the deepest affection caused her to lay aside. Sonya hoped the older girl would not resent Bianca's attitude; she knew little of Anne Karen's nature or history.

Long ago in Russia she had known her parents and they had even belonged to the same group of Socialists. Now these Socialists had no faith or share in Russia's present doctrines and practice.

Moreover, Sonya herself had wandered far from the thought of her own iconoclastic girlhood. Yet it is true that the women who have themselves led the freest and most unconventional lives desire the most conventional and well ordered careers for the girls they learn to love later in their own lives. Perhaps they have discovered how hard life is for the woman who does not tread the customary way.

So Sonya desired, particularly for Nona Davis and Bianca Zoli, happy and congenial marriages according to the old formula that "happy women have no histories." She also desired a quiet future for herself. After the war had closed in victory for the Allies she and her husband planned to lead lives of dignity and quiet usefulness in New York. Would she be able to fit into this pattern which she had made for herself and which her husband evidently expected? Sonya sometimes wondered. After all how slight their knowledge of each other!

Then Sonya became interested in the contrast Bianca and Anne Karen afforded. They had come a little nearer her resting

place and were stopping to examine the figure of a dancing faun, which stood a few feet from one of the garden paths. Bianca was small, slight and fair, the other girl tall and dark, conspicuous as a scarlet lily.

Then Sonya's attention was distracted from the two girls by the appearance of a young officer who was walking toward her accompanied by an older woman who did not look like a desirable companion. From his insignia one recognized that the officer was an aviator, yet even with a casual glance Sonya found herself not pleased by his expression or manner.

However, she was scarcely conscious of her final thought for even as the impression came upon her the earth beneath her feet began to tremble violently, while a noise struck against her eardrums with terrific force.

Then she saw outside the park, but just next the iron fence around the gardens, a tall old house which began to stagger as if it had grown suddenly intoxicated.

It was so exactly what one should have anticipated, knowing that at any moment

the long-range German guns might be turned upon Paris, the city of Germany's eternal envy. Yet to the newcomers to Paris at least the shock was tremendous.

Nona, Mildred and Sonya jumped on the instant from their places, afterwards remaining transfixed.

Already the old house in their range of vision was beginning to fall. One wall was sagging and sinking slowly in. Then the roof drooped, then followed a crash, the tearing apart of ancient timbers and afterwards the heavy thuds when pieces of plaster struck the floors of the rooms below and then descended to the ground. Soon the air had become thick with dust, and one could see people running from the house into the street and hear their cries mingled with the cries of little children.

With the instinct of their Red Cross service uppermost a moment later, Sonya, Nona and Mildred started running toward the scene of disaster. Yet before she had gone many steps Sonya turned to discover what had become of Bianca and her companion.

Anne had moved aside from the path, but Bianca stood perfectly still beside the figure of the faun; surprise, fright, whatever the cause, had rendered her motionless.

And Sonya saw what evidently Bianca had not. Shaken from its pedestal by the movement of the earth, the more than life-sized stone figure was swaying toward her. Unless she moved swiftly, in an instant she would be crushed beneath it.

If Sonya called a warning she was not conscious of the fact. She did observe that the young officer, whom she had noticed a short time before, had also become aware of Bianca's danger. The next instant, with swift and unhesitating courage, which seemed to have defied space, he stood holding the statue in place through sheer force of muscle and will.

Sonya never understood how she reached Bianca, who still appeared to have lost all power of movement, and drew her out of the range of danger. She only knew that the moment after, as the American officer let go his hold, the statue fell forward on the ground, breaking into two pieces from sheer

weight, the head rolling apart from the body. The officer's action had been a simple one of course and yet one in which the body and mind had acted in perfect accord, the test of the aviator's ability and training.

Sonya paused only to offer hurried thanks.

By this time the crowd had come pouring out of the Luxembourg gallery and among them the other girls in her Red Cross unit.

Leaving Bianca and Anne Karen to express added gratitude, Sonya, with the other Red Cross nurses, hurried to offer what aid she could to the injured, who were being carried out of the wrecked building.

CHAPTER V

A Cloudless Night

WHEN the new unit of Red Cross workers finally returned to their small hotel they were obliged to confess their weariness.

Only a few persons had been seriously hurt by the destruction of the apartment house next the Luxembourg gardens. A number had been slightly injured, and nearly every occupant of the house at the moment it had received the long-range German shell, had been badly shocked and shaken.

Therefore, the group of American Red Cross nurses, who chanced to be on the scene at the moment of the disaster, had had their time and energy fully employed, until the more dangerously injured had been removed to hospitals and the others found refuge with friends.

"I trust no one of you is as tired as I am,"

Sonya remarked, dropping into a big leather chair, soon after entering her bedroom. "Nona, dear, I don't see how you have sufficient strength even to write a letter to Captain Martin."

Immediately upon their arrival Nona Davis had seated herself before a writing table and already had become deeply engaged.

"I wonder, Sonya, if I shall some day grow accustomed to writing Captain Martin, realizing that a stranger must read aloud my letters to him. At present I feel a self-consciousness, which makes writing so much more difficult?"

"Oh, you are sure to grow accustomed to it in time," Sonya replied and then realizing that she had spoken indiscreetly, added hastily. "Yet of course, Nona, there is the possibility that Captain Martin's sight may be restored."

"I am not relying upon that possibility. Both Jack and I appreciate that the probability of his sight being restored is extremely remote. I only wish I could make him and other people understand that this question

has nothing to do with my affection, or my desire to become his wife. Besides, if I do wish to give my life to trying to make up to him for his loss just the least little bit, why haven't I the right? Sometimes, Sonya, I don't believe you really sympathize with me."

But, although Sonya shook her head reproachfully at this suggestion, after Nona recommenced her writing she continued thinking of her.

Was Nona's love for Captain Martin really uninfluenced by his blindness as she believed? The older woman, knowing more of human life and human nature, was not so sure.

Since the outbreak of the war Nona Davis' entire time and thought and heart had been absorbed by it and in it. The romantic affairs through which she had passed in the last four years had been only incidental; an inevitable part of every attractive girl's history, and Nona had been far less affected by them than she had imagined.

In the early days of their acquaintance,

when Lieutenant Martin had been young, vital and ambitious, unreasonably enough Nona had not returned his devotion. Now, when the war had broken his physical strength Nona loved him. Well, Sonya, although she could not feel enthusiastic at the prospect of Nona's marriage, nevertheless, could not but confess that Captain Martin was a stronger, finer man spiritually through the very greatness of his affliction. And certainly life owed him what Nona would be able to give.

There would be many girls in Nona's same situation. Sonya could only wonder how much happiness the future would hold for them.

Immediately upon her return to the hotel, Sonya had received a message saying that her husband's ship would probably reach a French port the next day.

As a surgeon of the marines, Dr. Clark was crossing upon a United States battleship, manned by the navy, but also bringing several companies of marines to France who were to be rushed at once to the battlefield to reinforce their comrades.

The Rev. Howard Courtney, the United States chaplain to whom Janet Perry was engaged, accompanied him.

Therefore Sonya's thoughts now wandered to her husband. What tremendously important work lay ahead of him and indeed of his entire corps of assistants! Once again Sonya wished that she had more faith in her own ability as a nurse.

However, during the few moments while Nona and Sonya were talking and afterwards, Bianca Zoli had been moving about the room putting away her own and Sonya's possessions. Apparently she was paying no attention to what was being said, having the rare gift of being able to efface herself when a situation seemed to require it.

During the past year Bianca had fallen into the habit of making herself extremely useful to Sonya in small ways, which the older woman greatly appreciated. If Bianca had not been allowed to engage in rough work by her Italian peasant mother, nevertheless she had a deftness and a knowledge of many small arts of which American girls are far too ignorant.

Actually Bianca could move without making a noise and also, whatever she might feel, could usually control the outward expression of her emotions. This had been one of the reasons for her rather surprising success with whatever Red Cross work she had been allowed to undertake. Moreover, Bianca possessed an extraordinary tirelessness and power of endurance which is often true of fragile-looking persons.

"Sonya dear, don't you think you had best lie down now till dinner time?" she suggested, unfolding a lovely blue tea-gown which was part of the older woman's trousseau.

"Anne Karen asked me to tell you that the officer we met in the Luxembourg gardens asked the privilege of coming to the hotel tonight to pay his respects to you. I don't know why I was so stupid as to stand perfectly still this afternoon waiting for some one to rescue me. I suppose I really was stunned by the suddenness of the explosion so near us. I do hope I shall never be so stupid again. You disappeared, Sonya, before the officer could make himself

known to you. He is a captain in one of our flying corps, a Captain Preston. I heard him tell Miss Karen that he had been a member of the Lafayette Escadrille, but after we entered the war had been transferred to our flying service."

"Nonsense, it is incredible that a boy so young should have become a captain!" Sonya replied, speaking with a good deal of personal irritation. Still I believe I did observe a captain's bars on his uniform. But why in the world does Captain Preston have to come to our hotel tonight? I had planned to tumble into bed immediately after dinner. Now I suppose I must sit up and play chaperon, because this strange young officer appears to have been attracted by Anne Karen. Really I cannot undertake this responsibility. At the most critical time of the war I came to Europe to assume more serious duties."

"Then why don't you say you are too tired and ask to be excused," Bianca suggested sensibly. "I told Miss Karen I thought it presumptuous to call upon us after so accidental a meeting," Bianca concluded.

"So Captain Preston wishes to call upon 'us,' which means you also, Bianca mia, and not just Anne Karen alone," Sonya continued more amiably. "Well, perhaps I may have the good sense to take your advice, if you and Anne don't mind too seriously not pursuing the acquaintance of this unknown officer. I am grateful to him for thinking and acting so quickly in coming to your rescue. Yet personally I did not find him prepossessing."

"I did not care for him either," Bianca answered, but with no change of expression and offering no reason for her failure to like the officer toward whom she might reasonably have been expected to feel gratitude.

"Heartless Bianca, when the young aviator saved your life!" murmured Nona, who had been listening to the latter part of the conversation.

Nona was not particularly in earnest, so there was no explanation on her teasing speech to account for Bianca's flushing in a fashion most unlike her.

"Captain Preston did not save my life,

he merely prevented my being hurt. It would be absurd to regard such a circumstance seriously when I expect to face real danger."

Bianca's tone was one of complete and offended dignity so that, except for Sonya's warning shake of the head, Nona would have laughed openly. Naturally if Bianca were keyed to a heroic point, as most of the new Red Cross workers in Europe undoubtedly were, she did not wish to descend from the grand mood. Nona Davis, however, had nursed at the battlefront so long she had learned that not even the soldier's or the nurse's life is at all times heroic. They also must have their moments of weakness, of everydayness, even of absurdity together with the fine things. Even soldiers and Red Cross nurses were only human beings.

As circumstances developed neither Sonya nor Bianca were to escape the young American aviator.

At dinner, where the guests were served at one long table in French pension fashion, Janet Perry asked a question concerning their new acquaintance of the afternoon.

In replying Anne Karen pronounced his name, Captain Preston, so that she attracted the attention of an American woman sitting opposite her, who had been a resident of Paris for many years.

"I wonder if you can mean Captain James Preston—Jimmie Preston, his friends call him, because he is one of our American Aces?" she said. "I believe he has brought down forty-one enemy planes. I am surprised at his being in Paris now when conditions at the front are so critical. However, with the Germans between forty and fifty miles from Paris an aviator may be here one hour and across the line another. Also it may be possible he is bringing important information to Paris."

As they were passing through the small vestibule hall which led from the dining-room half an hour later, Bianca and Sonya came face-to-face with the young American aviator, who had just entered the front door.

Under the circumstances Bianca could do nothing save introduce him to Sonya. Then she departed to find Anne Karen,

who had remained in the dining-room to make further investigations of the young officer's history from her new American acquaintance.

Against her will, yet feeling there was nothing else to do, Sonya soon after found herself seated in an uncomfortable chair trying to stifle her yawns while Anne Karen and the officer talked. She was a little amused, because, although Bianca sat beside them, she refused to have any share in the conversation, but wore her little detached air of cool politeness which was at once entertaining and annoying.

Several times Sonya noticed the young officer looking at Bianca, as if he did not know whether to be interested or angered by her manner, but really she was too much of a child to be taken seriously.

There was a chance that for a moment Sonya had almost fallen asleep, however, under no circumstances was she to have the quiet evening she had dreamed of.

Suddenly through the great city of Paris—Paris of the dark and bloody days of the summer of 1918—Sonya heard the blowing of many whistles.

"They have come, the Boches! As it is a cloudless night I have been fearing this would happen."

Captain Preston made this remark aloud, yet he turned toward Bianca.

"You must not be afraid, this is only another German air raid and ordinarily we have twenty minutes' warning before the raiders are upon us. We had better make our way to the cellar as soon as possible."

There was no excitement, no nervousness, no panic among the guests at the Hotel Florence. Afterwards the group of Red Cross nurses who had so lately arrived in Paris, confessed that they were glad to have been through the experience of the raid.

Personally Sonya decided she never meant to forget the revelation of human character that the scene in which she played a part both as actor and audience portrayed.

The refugees who spent the greater part of the night in the cellar of the Hotel Florence were not only the guests of the hotel. Quite as if it were the usual program with them, neighbors poured in from several adjoining houses. Without a "by your

leave" passers-by in the street rushed in for shelter.

A good many persons were already assembled in the cellar when an old woman entered. The hotel proprietor explained to Sonya that she was a countess who had been living at the Florence for twelve years and had never entered the dining-room with the other guests, always preferring to have her meals served in her own room. But tonight as she took her seat on an upturned box beside Sonya she was wearing an evening gown and all her jewels. Just what idea possessed her it was difficult to fathom; she may have been afraid of thieves entering the house when all the inmates were below stairs, or in case she perished perhaps she wished to die in full regalia.

During the evening the countess confessed to Sonya that she had been through fifty-one air raids in Paris within the past year, nevertheless she preferred living in Paris even under such circumstances to living in any other place in the world.

During the time Sonya listened to the elderly woman's confidences, she also

studied her group of Red Cross girls, wondering if any one of them were seriously alarmed.

Nona Davis sat a little apart from any one else with her hands folded and apparently dreaming. In the dim light with her pale gold hair, her large blue eyes, and expression of spiritual devotion, she suggested a Fra Angelico angel, although a far more practical angel than the old Italian master and painter of heavenly nuns ever portrayed.

Mildred Thornton was as self-possessed and as apparently forgetful of herself as usual. Now and then she placed her arm about her sister-in-law, Barbara, begging Barbara to sleep, insisting that she would watch over her. Occasionally, getting up she would walk about among the French people, talking to them in their own language and hearing and sympathizing with their troubled histories.

Janet Perry, who was perhaps not physically so strong as the other nurses, after an hour of strained waiting, had fallen asleep in her cousin Louise Roberts's lap,

as if she were in fact the tired child she appeared to be. Louise looked as stoical as an Indian, save that her hand sometimes unconsciously smoothed Janet's hair. Having promised Howard Courtnay to look after Janet and so far as she could to protect her, Louise regarded her promise sacredly.

Among the new nurses, Wilhelmina Jones, who had seemed to grow stronger and more capable with every mile of the journey to Paris, spent all the long hours of the raid sitting on the end of a ladder, nursing a baby she had rescued from a sleepy French mother. At the same time she acquired her first lesson in French from a *poilu*, who had come in from the street to save himself further injury, having already lost an arm in the war.

In true Russian fashion Anne Karen betrayed a great deal of emotionalism, talking continuously to the young American aviator, at one moment seeming curiously exhilarated and at the next depressed.

Sonya observed that although Captain Preston listened to Anne's conversation

with a kind of fatigued politeness, his gaze was often concentrated upon Bianca.

She sat very stiff and straight upon a small stool as fair as a wax doll and as serene as she had been amid the greater danger of the sinking of the hospital ship, *Consolation*.

Once or twice Sonya thought of asking Bianca if she did not wish to cuddle in her lap and perhaps sleep, but then she did not wish to offend the young girl's dignity. Of course Bianca was an enigma, such a strange combination of childishness and mature wisdom!

It was nearly dawn before whistles began to blow a second time, but this time proclaiming that further danger from this air raid was not to be feared.

CHAPTER VI

An Old Castle Fortress

WITHIN a few days the new Red Cross staff arrived in the immediate vicinity of the most critical battlefield in the world's history. The new hospital stood not many miles away from the little French village of Château-Thierry in the midst of a wide semi-circle swept by the flames of war.

Beginning the previous March the last German drive, which had started with such amazing success, was only now revealing signs of weakness. Yet it must be remembered that, although Marshal Foch was now Commander-in-Chief of the allied armies, the great counter-offensive was still delayed.

The German Aisne offensive which began on May 27th, had advanced rapidly toward the river Marne and Paris. Nevertheless, there had been some brilliant and successful attacks made by the American troops who

were now holding the bank of the Marne opposite Château-Thierry.

It was toward dusk when, in the neighborhood of the newly organized hospital, a woman and a young girl mysteriously appeared walking down a narrow path which led into a woods not far away.

If there had been onlookers they would have received the impression that they had come forth from the earth itself, and as a matter of fact this would have been true. Sonya Clark and Bianca had just climbed up a short ladder which led from an underground passageway, leading from the hospital. Beyond them, however, lay a close mass of heavy foliage crowning trees of varying heights, in reality the new American hospital.

Years before the present hospital had been a castle fortress with deep and wide subterranean passages; now these passages had been transformed into modern trenches where the sick and wounded could be sheltered and cared for in case of bombardment.

The woman and girl walked on rapidly

and in silence for a few moments toward the seclusion of the forest. At the edge, where the trees formed a protective screen, Sonya stopped and slipping her arm about the young girl's shoulders they both stopped to look back.

Unless one were familiar with the character and location of the hospital, even at so short a distance its discovery might have been a puzzle, so careful was the camouflage.

Yet neither Sonya nor Bianca were looking at the hospital, instead they were watching the long line of camions and motor trucks and buses all moving in the dusk toward the neighborhood of Château-Thierry.

As they stood there a company of marines marched past. It was no secret that between the hospital and the village lay an important division of American troops who had been ordered to hold this salient to the last man, since beyond lay the road to Paris.

"Are you frightened, Bianca, now we are so near the actual field of battle?" Sonya

asked. "Don't feel ashamed of confessing the fact to me. I am obliged to say we are nearer the danger zone than I had anticipated in spite of all my husband told me. I declare, Bianca, there is never a moment when I do not regret having allowed you to come with me."

Even as Sonya was speaking a shell had burst at some distance off and a broken fragment shrieked its way overhead.

"You understand, Bianca, that if the Germans do manage to break through our line in this neighborhood, they may be upon us here at the hospital before we can escape. I talked over the possibility of this with you before we came to Europe."

Bianca made a little movement, pressing her cheek against her companions hand which was with her a rare manifestation of affection.

"Foolish Sonya, I have asked you a hundred times not to speak or think of this subject again! Of course, I appreciate what may happen. But try please to remember I am not different from other girls who have had to meet this same

experience, here in France and in Belgium and Serbia, in whatever country the enemy has penetrated. Also I have told you many times the responsibility of my being here is not yours. I insisted upon undertaking a share of the Red Cross work, although I am not a full graduate nurse."

Then Bianca laughed a little laugh of enthusiasm and faith.

"But perhaps the reason I am not afraid, Sonya, is because in my heart of hearts I have not the faintest doubt that the American troops will hold the line here at Château-Thierry and do much more than hold the line. Never again will the Germans break through!"

In response the older woman smiled and then sighed.

"Oh well, in a large measure I share your faith, Bianca, particularly since I have seen the splendid young soldiers in this neighborhood. Their's is the spirit of the old crusaders born again into what some of us feared was only a money-loving, money-grabbing world. But because I am older than you I find myself dreading the

suffering our boys may have to endure here at the hospital where already we are beginning to care for them. As a matter of fact we should probably not be outside the hospital now, except that we both needed the air and exercise and one cannot always hide from danger."

"Oh, we are safe enough," Bianca answered calmly. "It has been the quietest day since our arrival. Besides, the Germans never seem to fire at sundown; as they are a methodical race I suppose they are having their supper at this hour. However, we must remember instructions and in case of a barrage lie flat down until the firing is over."

"Wiseest of girls!" Sonya exclaimed, speaking more light-heartedly than she felt. As it was an unwritten law among the women workers in the war zone never to betray depression to one another, Sonya considered that she had been taking an unfair advantage of Bianca.

However, as Bianca Zoli's character unfolded she was becoming more and more interesting to her friend and guardian.

In the early days in Italy when she had first made the young girl's acquaintance, Bianca had seemed rather a fragile person both mentally and physically, with the most childlike and gentle personality. Then had followed the revelation that she was neither so childlike nor so simple in nature as she appeared, and afterwards Bianca's own revulsion from her former life and training.

Of late a new Bianca was slowly developing from the roots of the former one. Still she retained her childlike manner and perhaps a certain stupidity upon many subjects familiar to American girls. Yet she had her own peculiar character of wisdom. At times Sonya wondered if the day might not come when Bianca would change suddenly from girlhood to womanhood. So often she thought of Bianca's strange parentage, the Italian peasant mother, strong both for good and evil, and the weak American father, who had spent his life remembering he was a gentleman at the expense of other people. Was not the puzzle of Bianca the fact that though resembling her delicate and hand-

some father, she possessed certain of her mother's characteristics?

But suddenly the woman and girl paused in their short walk into the woods. They had noticed a few yards away a group of American marines seated about a small camp-fire, the smoke of which was lost before it reached the top of the trees.

There was nothing unusual in the spectacle. Relieved from duty, the soldiers were often in the habit of slipping away from their quarters into this comparatively peaceful bit of forest to enjoy a little rest and entertainment.

At present they were not talking, but smoking in silence. Unexpectedly one of them, whose head was bent forward so that his face was not visible, began singing.

“There is a Home-land, a true land,
Across the sea,
Where they watch and wait,
And trust in me.
I'll go back to that land
When my task is done;
I'll go back to that land
When my fight is won,
And say to them that mourn:
'God's peace is yours forevermore——’

“There is a brave land, a red land,
About me here,
Where they watch and wait,
Nor weep, nor fear.
I’ll go back from this land
When my task is done
I’ll go back from this land
When my fight is won,
Saying to them that mourn:
‘God’s peace is yours forevermore.’ ”

The song was sung with perfect simplicity and in a low voice, almost as if the soldier were singing to himself, but there was a quality in his singing which kept his companions silent for a few moments after he had finished.

As for Sonya, the moment the song started she had moved a few steps further toward the group and had then stopped; it was too near twilight to see their faces distinctly.

“Don’t you think we might introduce ourselves to our own men, Bianca?” Sonya inquired, not because her decision rested upon her companion’s judgment, but because she wished for the instant to steady her own nerves.

"I have some chocolate perhaps they might like to have. Do you know I just had the most absurd impression, as if Carlo Navara were singing the song we just heard—Carlo to whom singing is as natural as speech to most persons! How badly Carlo has treated me ever since my engagement, never even replying to my letter in which I told him of my approaching marriage! Do you know, Bianca, whether his concert tour in the west has been a success? I always have intended to tell you that I was under the impression Carlo sang the anthem at my wedding. I never have been able to rid myself of the idea, absurd as it seems, with Carlo in reality many miles away. [Knowing how fond I am of him I don't think he has been kind never to let me hear where he is or what he is doing."

"But Carlo is not in the west. I suppose I should have told you before this, Sonya. He found he had sufficiently recovered from his old wound to be admitted into the service, and the day before you were married he joined a company of United States

marines. But come on, the men have already seen us and must be wondering why we continue to stand here and talk. Besides, I believe one of them is Carlo. He expected to be sent directly to the front since his experience in fighting in Italy made the training in camp unnecessary."

As Bianca spoke she and Sonya both moved up toward the group of men who had risen at their approach. Three of them were United States marines and the fourth a French poilu.

As both Sonya and Bianca were wearing their Red Cross uniforms there was nothing surprising in their presence or in their friendliness.

However, one of the marines, jumping to his feet, came quickly forward and seized hold of Bianca's hand. Then forgetting his companions and his American nationality, in Italian fashion he lifted the young girl's fingers to his lips.

"Bianca, this is the age of miracles. Yet I have been wondering if I might not by chance see you. Our company of

marines was sent directly to this sector and lately I learned that Dr. Clark and his staff of Red Cross assistants had reached the new hospital in this neighborhood.

Then, his manner suddenly changing, Carlo turned to Sonya.

"I am glad to see you again, Mrs. Clark. Indeed this is the first opportunity I have had to congratulate you since your marriage. Be sure I wish you every happiness."

Carlo's tone was entirely courteous, notwithstanding Sonya felt curiously hurt; all of his old affection and boyish appeal seemed entirely to have disappeared.

Instead of continuing to devote his attention to her, he at once turned to Bianca.

"My, but it is good to see you, Bianca, although it is sheer madness for you to be in this neighborhood! If I were your brother in reality as I feel I am in spirit I should never have permitted you to be here."

But Bianca was not willing to discuss this subject which seemed to meet her at every turn.

"But I can't see how you managed to reach France so quickly, Carlo!" she suggested, determined to change the current of his thoughts. "We sailed so soon ourselves and yet you are in advance of us. We had a wonderful crossing."

Then Bianca and Carlo walked a little away from the rest of the group, leaving Sonya alone to distribute her chocolate.

A few moments after, however, they returned, Carlo going directly up to Sonya.

"I wish you would take Bianca back to the hospital at once, Mrs. Clark. When night falls there is always danger of an unexpected attack. I am sorry not to be able to accompany you, but I must report for duty immediately."

CHAPTER VII

A Question of Temperaments

WITHIN a short time after the arrival of the staff of surgeons and physicians and their corps of nurses and assistants, the newly equipped hospital in the neighborhood of Château-Thierry had begun to receive a limited number of the wounded. And this in spite of the fact that at present there was no violent fighting in the immediate sector.

A short lull had come between storms. Marshal Foch, having assumed supreme command, the allied world was waiting with faith and patience for the wide movement of the long-desired allied offensive which was to force the German retreat.

In the meantime, although the German advance had suffered a check, the enemy was continuing to pour upon the allied armies and the French countryside shots, shells, gases, whatever they possessed, cre-

ated by the ingenuity of man for destruction. Yet actually here in the Marne salient the opposing armies were waiting in a troubled dream, a dream in which they were conscious both of the dangers and the goals ahead.

Inside his hospital, not far from the battle line, Surgeon David Clark of the marines, at present in command of the hospital, was making every effort to bring the discipline of his staff to the highest degree of military efficiency in the short time allowed them before the next attack.

In the early days, after their arrival at the hospital, Sonya realized that she had found the answer to the question she had frequently asked herself of late. It was true she had married a man concerning whose character she had but little knowledge. Moreover, he must have been equally ignorant of hers. And yet neither of them had youth as an excuse in case their marriage should turn out to have been a mistake.

Aboard the hospital ship, *Consolation*, she had seldom come in contact with the commanding medical officer. During their

occasional meetings he had seemed courteous, and although Sonya had been conscious that he was attracted by her, she had not taken his attitude seriously. Later, rescued from the submarine attack, she and Dr. Clark had spent a number of days constantly in each other's society. And it was in those days, freed of responsibility, that Dr. Clark had revealed the gentler and more personal side of his nature, and soon after arriving in New York Sonya had made up her mind to accept his proposal of marriage.

Yet at the time of her engagement, the thought of immediate marriage had been far from Sonya's mind, until the urgency of Dr. Clark's intention to return at once to the war zone had influenced her to agree that the ceremony be performed before his sailing.

It was not Sonya's original impression that she had married without a good deal of consideration of so serious a problem. The questioning had developed after her marriage, not before. Certainly she and Dr. Clark had seemed suited to each other

in many ways. He was older and a man of ability and power. When the war was past he could offer her the home and position she had come to desire after her adventurous life, while she could bring to him the gaiety and relief he required after the serious strain of his professional life. Then also, she would be relieved by her marriage from Carlo's ridiculous attachment, leaving him free to find some one better suited to his needs.

And Sonya was by no means convinced that her marriage was a mistake, only she was suffering from several shocks and surprises incidental to the early days of all matrimony.

She had believed herself prepared to see but little of her husband until his services to his country were no longer required, yet she had not anticipated such a degree of sacrifice. Moreover it was difficult to accept the fact that, meeting her husband upon a professional footing, he oftentimes treated her as if she were a stranger, or if not a stranger like some one in his employ from whom he expected a certain standard of service.

This was particularly difficult for Sonya to accept because in their rare moments of privacy he appeared so completely under her dominion. Therefore, when the other situation arose she was surprised and puzzled and more than either of these things, hurt.

A part of the hospital training in the early days before the great and final struggle which was undoubtedly approaching, was a drill in the prompt and efficient use of the gas masks. It was a part of the many small and unrecorded heroisms required of a nurse that she learn to adjust in the shortest possible time not only her own gas mask, but the mask of her patient, and the patient must of course be looked after first.

Dr. Clark's practice at his own hospital in the days of comparative quiet was to have a sudden unexpected signal of a gas attack. Then he observed with what swiftness and efficiency his staff obeyed directions.

As a matter of fact he was not of course merely observing their efficiency in the

use of gas masks, but the general ability of his corps of assistants with the idea of finding out the most able and the most reliable among both his physicians and nurses. His own work as head of a hospital was like that of any other commanding officer, he must learn to make the best use of the force at his disposal.

Later, when the great allied drive began, every bit of strength and ability inside the hospital would be taxed even as it was being tried outside on the battlefield.

And fortunately or unfortunately Dr. Clark had not been so oblivious to Sonya's work as a nurse on board the hospital ship, *Consolation*, as she had imagined. Even then he had taken the measure of what he considered her nursing capacity. She was reasonably successful if too severe a strain were not put upon her emotional nature. If her sympathies became too actively engaged her nerves were apt to go to pieces.

Had Sonya been willing to marry him and not come abroad to continue her Red Cross nursing under his direction, Dr. Clark would have been better satisfied, although

of course he understood that Sonya would be useful in many departments of the hospital work. There were certain responsibilities she would be able to assume better than most persons. But Dr. Clark did not intend to call upon his wife for the more painful and strenuous hospital experiences.

However, at the present time he was considering very carefully the members of his staff who would be best suited to the most serious tasks.

Miss Blackstone could always be relied upon. One did not have to trouble about her, she was always at hand cool and tireless in any emergency. Among his new nurses Dr. Clark was beginning to be especially satisfied with Mildred Thornton's attitude; she was quiet, possessed unusual judgment and a spirit of complete self-sacrifice.

Louise Roberts had valuable qualities also, as she paid minute attention to detail and followed every order, although she seemed in a measure to lack the initiative necessary in war nursing, but frequently unnecessary when a physician was able to devote more time to each patient.

Wilhelmina Jones appeared to have an inexhaustible store of strength and cheerfulness, while Nona Davis' spiritual qualities seemed to take the place of a greater physical energy.

Even though he had not expected a great deal of his wife, nevertheless it was true that during the first days at the hospital her work was actually more disappointing than he had anticipated. To his mind she seemed not to show sufficient regard for the hospital discipline in her attitude both to nurses and patients. Although he did not speak of his disappointment, Sonya was acutely aware of it and one day received extremely uncomfortable evidence of the fact. It was the morning after her own and Bianca's short walk into the woods and unexpected meeting with Carlo Navara.

Sonya was on duty in one of the wards caring for a boy who had been brought into the hospital the night before, after being fatally injured by the explosion of a shell. He had no idea how seriously he was hurt, yet Sonya had been told to find out if there were any last messages or

tokens the boy might wish to deliver, but without frightening him with the knowledge that he was approaching the end of his life's journey.

He was such a charming boy and so gay, so like the son every woman dreams of possessing that at first Sonya had not the courage to approach the issue with him. As he seemed to wish to talk and could do himself no harm, she had merely listened, almost as his own mother might.

"I tell you, nurse, it is coming now in a few days, Marshal Foch's great counter-drive. And this time the Allies are going to win. It is America's first real chance. Our troops have been told to hold the Château-Thierry-Soissons line, but holding the line is going to mean chasing the Germans back to Germany pretty soon. If any of the people in Europe have thought we were slackers and were either afraid or else did not know how to fight, why I would like to bet you we are going to show them just here in this little pocket of the Marne. But you won't let them keep me here in the hospital when things begin to get lively.

Promise me you will get me well in time for the fun."

It was at this moment, with Sonya trying to answer this request and at the same time to let the boy know something of what fate held in store for him, that the signal for a gas-mask drill was unexpectedly given.

The signal was first announced by the ringing of a bell. Then, entering the ward, the order was delivered by word of mouth.

But Sonya did not hear the bell ring, nor was her attention attracted by the actual command.

It was the boy himself who made her realize. Then, when she finally arose and looked about, having been kneeling on the floor by her patient's bedside, she discovered that every gas mask in the ward had been adjusted, only she and her patient remained unprotected.

And as the order to put on the masks had come from Dr. Clark himself, he was standing waiting for her to become conscious of her negligence.

Glancing shamefacedly toward her husband, Sonya caught the look of censure

directed toward her, which was entirely impersonal. Yet she had never imagined he could appear so disapproving.

Moreover, Sonya thought she beheld a look of satisfaction upon Miss Blackstone's homely but efficient countenance at this fresh evidence of her inefficiency.

It was really the wounded boy who undertook to comfort his nurse.

"Don't you mind that old codger's glaring at you; we would have had our gas masks on in a jiffy if there had been any real need," he remarked cheerfully, not knowing Sonya's relation to the distinguished surgeon. "Our attention was on something more interesting. I was trying to tell you what we doughboys mean to do toward helping to win the war."

Sonya's patient continued to talk on bravely for a little time after, but he grew steadily weaker, and at last seemed to guess what she merely suggested with infinite gentleness.

At last he gave her a letter he had written to his mother and also a small package.

“In case I don’t get well I wonder if you would mind writing mother for me?” he asked. “Tell her if I can’t go on with the fight ‘over here’ I’ll do my best to keep on fighting for the right with the fellows who have crossed to ‘over there.’ You see mother believes the life on this earth is only a little part of the great struggle. She even thinks maybe our spirits can come back to this earth to help. I don’t know, but perhaps I will know pretty soon. I just wish mother to understand I was not afraid at the end, though I am sorry to go because I did want to be under the wire when the great race is won.”

Toward midday Dr. Clark joined his wife at the boy’s bedside. He was gentle and considerate and did more than the young soldier could ever have realized to relieve his pain. But the boy found no consolation in his presence.

At one o’clock he died with his hand in Sonya’s and in passing Sonya seemed to represent the boy’s dream of his mother.

Afterwards, preparing to leave the ward, Sonya found that her knees were shaking

so from the experience through which she had just passed that she was scarcely able to walk. If her husband had not been looking at her she would not so much have minded, yet she knew he would have no patience with such weakness.

Nevertheless, she heard him saying politely as he would have spoken to any one of his nurses.

"You had best rest for the remainder of the afternoon. I don't believe you feel equal to further work."

The tone was kind enough, yet Sonya knew Dr. Clark did not expect his nurses to give way to their own physical needs when the demand for their services was so great.

However, Sonya dared not trust herself and was thus forced to follow her husband's advice.

CHAPTER VIII

Wings of the Morning

BEHIND the Château-Thierry-Soissons road, sheltered as far as possible from observation by the enemy, lay an enormous American aviation camp.

One afternoon a group of the Red Cross nurses, having received permission from the superintendent of their hospital, drove over to the camp in one of the hospital motors. The little party was made up of Mildred Thornton, Barbara Thornton, Anne Karen and Bianca Zoli.

Their invitation had come from Captain Preston, their recent acquaintance in Paris. But at the time of their meeting, Captain Preston had explained that he was only in Paris upon a temporary mission and would shortly return to his more permanent station.

His note of invitation had been addressed to Sonya, who very wisely had delivered it

at once to Miss Blackstone, declining herself to make one of the party. She did this for several reasons, the chief one the fear of her husband's disapproval should she show any desire to take advantage of a relaxation in discipline.

Miss Blackstone of course understood that even Red Cross nurses could not work continuously save in the hours when almost superhuman demands were made upon them. And since she was convinced that these hours of tremendous strain were approaching, she wished her nurses to be in as good condition as possible when this time arrived.

Moreover, the invitation to visit the enormous aviation camp offered a rare opportunity, and also Captain Preston had an exceptionally brilliant record as one of the most successful and daring of the American airmen.

A hospital orderly accompanied the four girls as well as their motor driver.

Those who know the history of the weeks preceding the victorious allied offensive which led so rapidly to victory, realize to

what extent this success was due to the work of the allied airmen.

There was scarcely a detail of Germany's preparations which they did not observe, photograph and report to the French, British, Italian and American High Commands. They knew the size and movement of the German armies, the emplacements of her batteries and her natural and artificial defenses.

It was true that Germany possessed an almost equal knowledge of the disposition of the allied troops and the scale of their preparations.

Yet there was one fact which neither side knew concerning the other, and this fact was of paramount importance:

At what hour of what day did the Germans plan to precipitate another grand offensive? At what hour of what day did Marshal Foch intend to surprise the enemy?

There were few other subjects discussed on either side the great battle-line in France.

If at all hours of the day and night single planes, units and squadrons of planes passed over the line from one side to the other,

this piece of information no airman had yet been able to bring back. Yet Marshal Foch and the generals under his command were employing every human agency to secure this knowledge so necessary to their own plans. It may also be assumed that the enemy was making the same effort.

As the four girls drove over to the American aviation field, they discussed the possible day, even the possible hour of the approaching offensive with almost as much interest and self-possession as if they had been actual soldiers.

"It is curious the effect war has upon one," Mildred Thornton exclaimed. "Naturally I believe I am one of the most peaceful persons in the world, sometimes even one of the most cowardly. Yet now I am as impatient for Marshal Foch to start his attack as if I were a soldier in a first-line trench waiting the signal to fire."

"Well, perhaps we won't have much less work to do," Barbara answered. "Goodness knows there are a sufficient number of the wounded being brought to our hospital in these last few days, until it seems to me

we are almost as busy as possible! I wonder how we will manage when we have ten times as many wounded to care for? Yet I too am anxious for the great hour to arrive."

"Would you mind discussing some more cheerful subject for a while?" Anne Karen suggested. "As long as we are off duty I think it is better to forget our responsibilities for a little. I confess I have already found the work at the hospital about as difficult as I am equal to and I rather dread anticipating the time when things will become so much worse. You have both had previous experience with the Red Cross nursing; I am afraid I did not appreciate just the kind of life we are forced to lead over here. I thought there would be more excitement and more variety. I wanted a chance to see the country and the soldiers. Perhaps I am not particularly well suited to nursing. In any case, Mrs. Thornton, I know I would much prefer being happily married, and if I had been in your place would never have come to France at a time like this."

Barbara shook her head.

"Oh, yes, you would, Miss Karen. I am sure you are under-valuing yourself. But you are right, this is not the time to discuss problems but to get as much pleasure and as much information out of the next hour or so as one can manage."

"I suppose Captain Preston will be waiting to receive us," Anne Karen remarked, evidently glad to change the subject. "I think he is giving us a very wonderful opportunity. Bianca may not be willing to confess the fact but I am sure it is because she attracted him in our brief acquaintance in Paris. Indeed he confessed as much to me, which was not very flattering when I was trying to make myself especially agreeable to him. I was awfully impressed at talking to one of the most famous aviators in the United States air service."

Bianca had flushed uncomfortably.

"Please don't make such an absurd suggestion. Besides I told you, Miss Karen, that I did not like Captain Preston. I am not in the least denying the fact that he is an extraordinary airman and is

entrusted with the most delicate missions. Nevertheless, I did not like his boasting of the fact at our first meeting. I rather think he presumed on our accidental meeting in coming to call on us so soon."

Bianca turned to Mildred Thornton with an appeal in her manner which was unusual.

"I suppose you think I should not have come on this trip today as I don't like Captain Preston. Still I am tremendously anxious to see the aviation field and I thought Sonya would come with us until the last moment. You will let me stay beside you this afternoon, won't you? I wish I could grow accustomed to meeting strangers and think as little of it as most American girls do."

"Nonsense, Bianca, you are merely pretending to be a child, when in fact you are not in the least one!" Anne Karen ejaculated, showing an irritability no one had noticed so plainly in her before. "Personally I believe you are one of the girls who merely pretends indifference in order to seem more worth while. I am wise enough to understand this is your way of trying to attract Captain Preston."

Barbara Thornton, who was sitting next Bianca, put her arm about her in a protecting fashion.

"I am sorry, Miss Karen, but we do not talk to Bianca in this fashion. Bianca is much younger than the rest of us and I am afraid Mrs. Clark would not like it."

Having a clever habit of personal analysis Barbara Thornton studied the other girl a little narrowly.

She did not approve of Anne Karen, although willing to confess she had a decidedly picturesque appearance and a certain degree of charm. Nevertheless Anne Karen was essentially untrustworthy. She was also a little greedy, and in coming abroad to do Red Cross nursing one could not believe her motives had been purely unselfish. She was evidently both poor and ambitious and had believed that the nursing in Europe would give her certain social opportunities. But then Anne seemed actually more like a child than Bianca herself. One could easily imagine that, in order to have her own way, or to gain some end, she might do an entirely mischievous

thing without realizing the extent of the mischief.

After a short drive the four girls reached the outskirts of the great aviation field.

There they were met by Captain Preston and several of his friends, other aviation officers whose time seemed entirely at their disposal. But of course there is no branch of the army service which offers the same amount of leisure as the air since, when an aviator is not flying there is so little to occupy his energy.

Fortunately this afternoon a squadron of bombing planes was about to take flight over the enemy lines. According to custom, the order had been given several hours before, so that already the machines were loaded, warmed up and drawn out of the hangars.

Since neither Bianca nor Anne Karen had seen the formation flying, Captain Preston led the way toward the ascension field, followed by Mildred and Barbara and their new acquaintances.

As they approached, it seemed that the signal from the field officer had just been

given. At the same instant the flight leader, with the motor of his machine humming sullenly, was taking the air. Between three and five minutes later he was followed by the second flight leader, who, Captain Preston explained, would take the place of the leader, if he were obliged to fall out, or were brought down.

Silently the girls saw eight machines rise each after the same interval of time, assume in the air the shape of the letter V, and then move off toward the eastern horizon.

Familiar as the sight must have been to the aviation officers, they remained as silent and absorbed as their girl companions until the air squadron was actually some distance on its way.

Then Captain Preston turned to Bianca.

"I do not care for the group flying half so much as the individual flight, which always seems to me more of a sporting proposition. However, one obeys orders. I am to go over the lines tomorrow on my supreme adventure, hoping to find out the secret for which the Allies are waiting. Won't you wish me good luck?"

Observing Bianca's expression the young aviator suddenly ceased speaking.

She had turned so pale that unquestionably something had made her unhappy; moreover her soft dark eyes which contradicted the coldness of the rest of her face now showed traces of tears.

The young officer became interested; Bianca had piqued him because of her indifference and a self-possession unusual in so young a girl. Now man-like he was anxious to discover to what influences she would respond. Was what he had just said the cause of her unexpected display of feeling?

The next instant Bianca explained to him. "I beg your pardon," she said a little stiffly; "some one of whom I was very fond in Italy, an aviator, was killed while flying over the Alps. The scene here today brought back thought of him so vividly. Of course I wish you good luck, only I did not suppose one would speak openly of so important a mission."

As Bianca's criticism was just, the officer flushed, while Bianca moved a few paces

away, showing her desire to take no further share in the conversation.

Immediately Captain Preston transferred his attention to Anne Karen, so that Anne appeared both pleased and excited. After all, he decided, she was a good deal more attractive than the younger girl and certainly more appreciative. Coldness is only interesting up to a certain point, afterwards it becomes tiresome.

Later, Anne took a scarlet ribbon from a little pocket-book, a ribbon not more scarlet than her lips were at the same moment.

"You will wear this tomorrow on your flight over the lines, won't you? It is both my color and the color of the Red Cross. You know I shall hope it may bring you good luck. Yes, I shall always remember the name of your machine, 'Wings of the Morning.' "

Indeed Anne and Captain Preston continued to talk to each other, scarcely noticing any one else, until the time arrived for the four girls to leave for the hospital.

At the time Bianca received no further attention.

CHAPTER IX

Two Farewells

ON that same evening, after an early and frugal hospital supper, Mildred Thornton, who was on duty in one of the wards, received a summons. Someone wished to speak to her for an urgent reason.

Extraordinarily puzzled by the message, after securing another nurse to take her place, Mildred hurried to the one and only small room in the hospital where any private conversation could be held. This was a room not much larger than a closet with no light or air except what might come through the door or a slit of a window high up overhead. The tiny chamber in the old fortress had probably served once as a place of imprisonment in long past days. It was therefore scarcely cheerful enough to be used for the sick, else it would not have been spared as the one small reception room for the hospital staff.

To Mildred's surprise she found waiting for her in this room a young officer of the marines whom she recognized at once.

"Lieutenant Wainwright, I thought we might meet each other again after dining at my home and learning that we were both bound for the same field of action, but I hardly expected the pleasure so soon."

Mildred spoke with cordiality and pleasure. She had liked the young officer at their one meeting, although at present her mind was absorbed in the work she had just deserted.

After the young officer had shaken hands, Mildred realized that his call had not been made for a conventional reason.

"I was in the company of marines who crossed to France on the same ship with Dr. Clark. Knowing of your presence at his hospital, Miss Thornton, I have come to ask you a favor. I have my commanding officer's permission, if you think my request unusual. May I be very sure of being able to speak to you alone?"

The young officer of the marines had been right in his choice of Mildred Thornton

as a confidant, notwithstanding their brief acquaintance.

If in social matters she believed herself to possess neither tact nor poise, in serious ones she was always helpful and self-assured.

"We had best go out of doors for a few moments. There is the best opportunity to be undisturbed."

A moment later the young officer and Mildred stood in the shelter of the left wall of the fortress, now employed as an American hospital. The night was dark and hot. Curious that they could hear the humming of the insects of the summer night close at hand and further away the low rumble of their own and the enemy guns.

"I want you to take charge of a package for me, Miss Thornton. In case you should ever hear of my having been taken prisoner by the Germans, or having disappeared altogether, will you on your return to New York deliver it to the person whose address you will find on the outside? I have volunteered for a service in which

either one of these two things is likely to take place. There is a grave reason why in either of these events I should wish the package delivered."

Asking no questions Mildred agreed instantly. In the past four years of her Red Cross nursing in Europe how many soldiers had made similar requests of her.

"Are you not volunteering very soon after your arrival at the front for a specially dangerous task? I should think some one who had more experience would have been chosen."

"Yes, but this seems to be my chance, the one I have waited for so long. I cannot tell you what it has meant to me to have been forced to remain in camp in the United States, until I was afraid the great fight over here might be finished before I could get into it. Now, well, of course, I cannot tell you what mission I am to undertake, except that I seem specially fitted for it. Otherwise I would not have been chosen; fifty other men in my company also volunteered. As a matter of fact I can speak German like a

native, having lived for a long time in Germany when I was a child. I am also an engineer with a special knowledge of bridge building." The officer stopped. "I must say nothing more; there is but one chance in a thousand that I may be successful, but understand whatever happens, I shall regret nothing. Now I must keep you no longer from your work. Good night."

To Mildred Thornton's surprise an instant later she was standing alone with a small package in her hand, while Lieutenant Wainwright's figure was being lost in the darkness.

As she walked back toward the entrance of the hospital to Mildred the young officer's spirit appeared typical of the American spirit in the war. If there had been many causes which had delayed his entry into the fight, now he had come with no time to lose and also with a special fitness for the work ahead. Moreover, whatever the result of his effort he would regret nothing.

Mildred felt both elated and depressed,

for these were days of terrible strain here in the neighborhood of Château-Thierry within the fateful valley of the Marne. Silently she prayed for the American troops who, not far away, were holding the German horde back from Paris.

Ever since her arrival in France, Mildred had been aware of an increased nervousness. In some cases the nervousness was carefully suppressed and in others the fear of the future was outspoken. She had never witnessed the same degree of uncertainty since the outbreak of the war. The apparent success of the German offensive, beginning on March 21st and continuing up to the present time without serious setback, had startled both France and the world.

However, the final result of Mildred's interview was to give her added courage to offset any lack of faith which might trouble her in weak moments.

The young officer of the marines, with whom she had just talked, had appeared efficient, gallant and serene. By this time Mildred knew there were thousands of

these soldier-sailors as well as a few French troops in the vicinity of the little village of Château-Thierry and all along the line from Rhiems to Soissons. There was no denying a new valor, a fresh confidence had been born of their presence among both soldiers and civilians who had grown weary, even if undaunted.

But Mildred was sorry to feel that Lieutenant Wainwright would probably be sacrificed. From his brief confidence she had guessed more than she allowed him to know. Evidently he had volunteered to cross as a spy into the German lines. There was the possibility that he hoped to destroy some bridge which the Germans were attempting to build across the Marne.

Absorbed in these reflections just as she was about to enter the hospital, Mildred was uncomfortably startled by hearing a voice behind her utter her name.

"Miss Thornton, may I speak to you?"

Turning she discovered another marine, this time a private.

The young man was Carlo Navara, and fortunately Bianca had already confided to

Mildred the fact that Carlo was stationed nearby.

Mildred was nevertheless surprised by the apparition. It was after dark when no one was supposed to come to the hospital save to bring in the wounded, or upon an errand which could not be postponed.

"Miss Thornton, will you ask Sonya, Mrs. Clark, to speak to me for a moment? Yes, I know you are surprised, but it is most important that I see her tonight."

It was not her affair, yet for some reason Mildred felt annoyed.

Why was Carlo always so dramatic? And would he never leave Sonya alone? But then he was such a boy, and because of his boyish quality hard to resist. Mildred knew she had no right to refuse his request. She would simply report his presence and his desire to Sonya and allow her to decide.

Carlo's need must be urgent else his superior officer would not have allowed him leave of absence.

"If you will come into the little waiting-room indoors I will try to find Mrs. Clark," Mildred agreed. "It may take me some time if she happens to be on duty."

But it chanced that Sonya, having finished her work for the day, had gone up to the small room set apart for her own and her husband's use.

She was extremely tired and again discouraged with herself for being weary. Mildred's knock and unexpected appearance startled her. Then she was annoyed by the message. What possible reason could Carlo have for desiring to see her at this hour? There seemed to be an entire disregard of ordinary military discipline in his unexpected visit. Moreover, the situation was uncomfortable. Sonya knew that both her husband and Miss Blackstone were engaged upon a serious operation, making interruption out of the question. Yet there was no one else to whom she could apply at present for permission to agree with Carlo's demand.

However, Sonya scarcely dared to decline doing what he asked, convinced that there must be some imperative need behind his summons.

She had taken off her Red Cross uniform and put on a soft gray gown, knotted about

the waist with a heavy cord. Now Sonya slipped a light coat over her informal costume, and having decided to take the risk of talking with Carlo for five minutes without official sanction, went down to the small room where Mildred had told her she would find him.

Yet Carlo-like, after she reached the room she found he had disappeared.

A little relieved, Sonya was about to go upstairs again when, standing in the self-same spot outside the hospital entrance, where he had greeted Mildred Thornton, Carlo's voice called:

"Please, Mrs. Clark, may we not talk out here? The night is so dark and it is so hot indoors."

Sonya moved out into the darkness.

But as she moved, she hesitated for an instant at the top of the single stone step which led into the front door of the American hospital. Behind her there was a dim light, yet sufficient to throw her figure into reflection.

To Carlo, it appeared that the Sonya he cared for, had altered into a much older

woman; in her gray dress tonight, with the hospital as her background, she was like a sister-of-charity, not the woman of the world he had known and loved.

However, when Sonya took hold of his hands, she was warm and sweet and friendly as she had always been. Yet to Carlo's young eyes, even in the one moment when he had seen her distinctly, she appeared to have changed in the few weeks since her marriage.

"Is there anything the matter? May I be of service to you?" she asked, her momentary irritation shamed and vanished after her first glance at Carlo's face. "I thought you were not pleased to see me the other afternoon, but of course you were only more interested to discover Bianca."

The woman and boy were standing just outside the hospital entrance so that the light inside afforded them an indistinct vision of each other's faces.

To Sonya, Carlo suggested a beautifully cut cameo, his features were so thin and delicately modeled, his eyes so deep and dark beneath his straight brows.

Not only did his face show the severe military training of these past weeks, there was a new expression of renunciation and heroic resolve.

"It is of Bianca I wish to speak to you," he began at the mention of her name. "I have reason to know, Mrs. Clark, that the comparative quiet of these last few days is soon to be succeeded by the most terrific fighting of the entire war, if one may dare make comparisons. I confess I was shocked the other afternoon and have been more so since, to think that Bianca is here so near what may be the bloodiest battleground of history. It is no secret that General Bundy has told us to hold the neighborhood of Château-Thierry at all costs. With the American soldiers in their present mood you know what that may mean. Yet if by chance the Germans do drive us back, if only for a few miles, this hospital may be in the midst of the fighting. And Bianca is so young. She is even more childish than most people would believe because she is also curiously old in other ways.

"She is really not like an American girl in spite of her efforts and I do not think she would be able to look after herself half so well. She is very ignorant about many things. Can you not by some means manage to have her sent back to Paris? There must be some one who will take charge of her there. You see, Sonya," Carlo seemed to have forgotten Sonya's new title, "Bianca was wonderfully kind to me during the saddest period of my life, sadder than those days in Italy when I believed my voice was gone forever. I really have come to feel as if Bianca were a younger sister. I cannot have the anxiety about her added to the other things I must endure."

Even if Sonya had not already been of Carlo's opinion with regard to Bianca his pleading would have convinced her.

"You are perfectly right, Carlo, and I will do my best," she replied. "I can understand you must have no patience with me, not to have kept Bianca away from this danger. I don't know how her will has managed to prevail over mine. But it

shall be as you ask. Bianca shall go back to Paris at the earliest opportunity. She will not, I think, defy my authority, although she is so extraordinarily determined to meet and endure the same dangers as the graduate Red Cross nurses."

"Then thank you, Sonya. But also I wish to say good-by to you. If I was not kind when I met you in the woods the other afternoon, perhaps it was because I wanted to hurt you a little when you have hurt me so much. Yet there are things I must never speak of to you now that you are married. But perhaps I may not see you again. In any case you will not forget me, Sonya. You see, I am permitted to tell you, but no one else, that Lieutenant Wainwright has chosen me to go with him upon a very difficult mission. I do not know why I should have been selected from among the others since I have never believed I had the courage or the ability of the most ordinary soldier. Yet I shall do my best."

"But Carlo," Sonya felt a desire to put her arms about the young man, who always

had seemed to her like a dearly loved son, "is it really necessary that it should be you? Remember your great gift as a singer, the pleasure you may be able to afford the world if your life is spared. Some one else——"

Sonya did not finish her speech and neither did Carlo answer it, knowing as they both did that the war had chosen the best. Among them no man had asked, that for any reason of later service to the world, he be spared the present gift of his life.

"You know my prayers will be with you. May you come safely back," Sonya whispered.

Then they both became conscious that a figure was behind them filling the doorway and so shutting off the light by which they had been able to see each other's faces.

At the same time Dr. Clark stepped over toward them.

"Sonya, this is incredible!" he began. "I am sorry, Private Navara, but you can understand it is impossible for us to allow interviews between our Red Cross

nurses and soldiers here in the hospital grounds after dusk? Under the circumstances I feel Mrs. Clark should be more observant of the hospital rules than any one else. Her presence is due to a special act of consideration on the part of the United States government which allows us to work together on this side."

Unable to make any suitable reply, Private Navara saluted his superior officer and immediately afterwards moved away, leaving Sonya and her husband alone.

Rarely had Sonya been more angry. In the twinkling of an eye it seemed to her she had been brought from the sublime to the ridiculous in a fashion which matrimony alone is able to accomplish.

In moments and places when it was just and necessary she had respected Dr. Clark's authority. But tonight it had not been necessary that he make an exhibition of his authority before Carlo.

He might have greeted the young soldier with some friendliness, not having seen him since they had parted in her apartment some weeks before. Whatever Dr.

Clark wished to say to her he might have said when they were alone.

Sonya remained silent, although Dr. Clark must have understood something of her state of mind.

"I am afraid being a war bride isn't altogether a success is it, Sonya," he said wearily, "even when one accompanies one's husband to the scene of action instead of being left behind. Forgive me if I seemed too blunt. I suppose a man who has been a surgeon as long as I have, has no right to claim the excuse of being dead tired, nor a man as old as I am, to confess that as long as we both live I shall never cease being jealous of that altogether too gifted and beautiful youth, with whom you have just been talking."

CHAPTER X

A Wounded Officer

THIRTY-SIX hours later Mildred Thornton had just come on duty and was entering the door of one of the hospital wards when Dr. Clark joined her.

“Will it be possible, Miss Thornton, for you to be ready to leave the hospital with me in five minutes? I have been called for consultation to one of the *postes de secours*. An officer has been wounded whose life is of the utmost importance. Even if it is not possible that he be saved he *must* be restored to consciousness. You understand that you may be exposed to greater danger than here at the hospital, but I have been watching your work and feel I may be able to rely on your courage and ability.”

Answering, “I will join you in less than five minutes,” Mildred disappeared to put on her Red Cross cloak and to secure a small bag she kept ready for emergency calls.

Only occasionally did Dr. Clark praise his assistants, so that naturally Mildred was gratified by his choice of her. Undoubtedly their mission was also one of extreme importance, involving more than saving the life of one officer, else Dr. Clark would never even temporarily have left his own responsibilities.

It was true that he held the reputation of being one of the greatest modern surgeons which explained the appeal having been made to him.

Within less than the allotted time Mildred and Dr. Clark, having entered a small motor car which stood waiting for them at a side entrance to the hospital, were moving off in the direction of Château-Thierry.

In spite of nearly four years of war-nursing experience, never had Mildred Thornton received so thrilling an impression as in the next hour.

It seemed to her that the ultimate expression of human activity had here at last reached the *n*th power and surely could travel no higher!

Far overhead and steadfastly ascending,

airplanes were moving across the sky toward the enemy country.

Recalling a verse by an English poet, which compares an airplane to a great gull, Mildred repeated the lines to herself. This morning the sun was shining so brilliantly and with the airplanes almost beyond the ordinary vision, the simile struck her as strangely true.

“The fresh cold wind of dawn blows on my face
As in the sun’s raw heart I swiftly fly,
And watch the seas glide by.
Scarce human seem I moving through the skies,
And far removed from warlike enterprise—
Like some great gull on high
Whose white and gleaming wings beat on through
space.”

Mildred glanced upward as these lines sang themselves into her consciousness. Now nearer at hand were other objects to absorb her close attention.

There stood a number of Red Cross ambulances surrounding Red Cross tents where the ambulance corps were stationed. Beyond, along a new line of railroad, but

lately built, slid trains filled with American troops and also carloads of ammunition. In every spot of strategic importance Mildred guessed there were batteries and machine guns, but carefully concealed by both natural and artificial barriers.

The road along which Dr. Clark and his Red Cross nurse were rapidly traveling was thick with dust. Camions loaded with every character of supply rushed by demanding the right of way. Cavalry officers trotted along on lean ambitious horses, a company of infantry marched past, coming from the opposite direction, evidently being transferred to some other point.

Mildred recognized what she believed to be an automobile containing several war correspondents. They wore the insignia of correspondents on their sleeves and were accompanied by an elderly American officer who was evidently explaining the preparations for the approaching battle.

Nor was the drive free from the actual noises of battle; at some distance off machine guns were firing, tap, tap, tap, as if they were giant woodpeckers bent upon

the destruction of some mammoth forest. Occasionally a shell exploded, often doing no damage save to a piece of earth which it managed to upturn. Beyond, over toward the village of Château-Thierry, now and then a column of dull blue smoke arose later dissipating itself in the morning air. The little village was still the center of occasional fire from the German machine guns.

Yet in the midst of all this Mildred Thornton had never any feeling of fear, her interest was too great. She also felt a gathering sense of security.

American business ability as well as American valor and determination was protecting the salient surrounding Château-Thierry. A surprise was awaiting the Germans who professed to have small respect for so untried and untrained a foe.

Meeting Dr. Clark and Mildred at one of the *postes de secours*, or first-aid trenches, was a young medical officer. At once he led them through a straight underground passage to the hospital trench.

"The officer was brought in this morning

just before dawn, having miraculously returned to our lines no one knows how. He was unconscious when the boys found him and has remained so ever since," Mildred overheard the medical officer explain. "We have done our best but so far without success. His colonel has been with him almost constantly, hoping that he might rally long enough to speak a few words."

Inside the first-aid trench—and Mildred, in spite of her long hospital experience now saw one for the first time—were double rows of stretchers along each side of the dugout. An operating table stood under a canopy of branches and leaves which allowed a fair amount of light to trickle through. Here, when a half hour's delay might mean life or death, minor operations were sometimes performed. At convenient spaces apart, medical chests, made as nearly bomb proof as possible, were filled with stores of sanitary dressings and anaesthetics and other first-aid necessities.

Lying upon one of the stretchers near the light, his body almost completely covered by a sheet, was the young officer to whom an

unusual amount of attention was being devoted.

As Mildred followed Dr. Clark and stood behind him, looking down at the wounded man, she was not particularly surprised to discover Lieutenant Wainwright. After receiving the summons and hearing of what importance the return to consciousness of the wounded officer might mean, the thought of Lieutenant Wainwright and of the mission he had lately undertaken had recurred to Mildred at intervals of a few moments.

The officer had told her enough of his task to have her guess that his secret and dangerous mission might be of vital importance.

Now there seemed but little hope. Presuming he had made the discovery, and accomplished the mission for which he had been more than willing to risk his life, he would never be able to impart the information it was hoped he had obtained.

Whatever his body wounds, the chief obstacle to his return to consciousness was an injury to the left side of the head, which

was causing intense pressure on the brain. A few minutes later Dr. Clark announced to the army surgeon who was to act as his assistant that an immediate operation was advisable:

“There will be nothing lost by the experiment; there is no possible chance for him to rally by any other means.”

Then, when the surgeon had gone to report the great surgeon's decision to the regimental colonel, who was walking up and down an adjoining trench, Mildred and Dr. Clark made the simple preparations necessary.

Two hours later Dr. Clark and Colonel Winfield were standing together near the army cot upon which Lieutenant Wainwright was lying.

“I am sorry, Colonel, but I have failed,” Dr. Clark announced. “The young fellow may live on a few hours, perhaps twenty-four, but he will never speak again and I believe never remember anything of the experience through which he has just passed. It is a great pity when he had come so near success. If one had not almost

ceased to marvel over feats of human courage and human endurance in this war I should say that it was incredible that under the circumstances he managed to get back into his own line. Miss Thornton has volunteered to remain on and watch, however, until the end. I must return to my other duties."

"Then you offer me absolutely no hope?" Colonel Winfield asked. "I tell you the welfare of the allied armies may depend upon this young officer's knowledge."

Dr. Clark was making ready to depart.

"There is always a possibility of hope in human life, Colonel; we doctors are never infallible. I simply tell you my impression."

Then turning to Mildred.

"Don't overtire yourself, Miss Thornton, remember there is much for you to do later on."

Afterwards for hours Mildred was left alone in the first-aid trench with the young officer of the marines. Occasionally some one would come to an opening, to find if she needed help or had news to report, but when Mildred shook her head the hospital orderly or assistant would disappear.

Seated on an army stool, within a few feet of her patient, Mildred's eyes rarely left his face.

Now and then, weary from her cramped position she would walk about the narrow space, yet even then her eyes kept guard.

Lieutenant Wainwright never moved; no one except a trained observer would have known that he was still alive, only occasionally there would be the faintest twitching of one or the other of his arms.

During her vigil Mildred could not but ponder what secret of such extraordinary value might be lost with the passing of the young officer.

The situation appeared particularly tragic. To give one's life to a cause and win, well, there are few except the world's cowards who would lament such a sacrifice. But to give one's all and lose! Mildred realized life demanded this of her unrewarded heroes.

However, although wise enough to say nothing, from the first she had not absolutely accepted Dr. Clark's verdict with regard to the wounded officer of the marines.

During her four years of war nursing she had been a witness to many apparent miracles.

Therefore, together with her watching, Mildred prayed—prayed that if the young officer had obtained the information to secure which he had penetrated the enemy's lines as a spy, he might be permitted not to have sacrificed his life in vain.

The world had grown so weary of war, both friends and foes alike.

Perhaps the secret which might end in victory for the Allies was now in this young marine officer's all too silent keeping.

But even as Mildred prayed she kept unceasing guard.

CHAPTER XI

The Recovery

FORTUNATELY it had not grown dark inside the *poste de secours* when Mildred Thornton saw the light covering over her patient move as if he had stirred beneath it.

As she was sitting beside him at the moment, she leaned over, scarcely breathing in her surprise and excitement.

He did not stir again; however, a little later, his lids slowly lifting, Mildred became aware of an expression in the young officer's eyes that she was not likely to forget.

It was a strangely tormented expression, as if from the hidden depths of memory he desired to recall some fact and found the effort too great. Only in the eyes of an animal had Mildred observed anything approaching the same expression, a dying animal who yearns for one instant of speech before the end.

Now, not only had Mildred Thornton been through a long and arduous experience as a Red Cross nurse, but she possessed both the personal gift of sympathy and of strong self-control. Moreover she had learned too much through her nursing not to appreciate the force of human thought and the ways in which men and women may help one another through crises.

Steadfastly, and as if she were not in the least agitated or uncertain, Mildred answered the look.

"I understand perfectly. You wish to tell me something of great importance. Please don't worry; you will be able to remember and to speak in a few moments. Now close your eyes and do not make the effort to think."

Yet, when with inexpressible relief, Lieutenant Wainright closing his eyes, relapsed again into unconsciousness, Mildred had to fight to keep firm hold on her own faith.

The next quarter of an hour seemed interminable, and yet Mildred realized that she must falter neither in spirit nor in flesh. A greater issue than one human

life was at stake, perhaps than many lives, something which might involve the future history and happiness of mankind.

So Mildred remained nearly as motionless as her patient.

After a little, as he appeared to be breathing more regularly, she concluded that he was not unconscious as he had been for many hours before, but in a kind of half sleep. If this were true, there was a better foundation for hope. So, knowing it was wiser that the young officer be untroubled by other presences if he awakened again, Mildred called in no one for consultation or for aid.

Most of human life is spent in waiting for great moments. Mildred had learned both patience and faith, from having been permitted to witness so much of both among the soldiers she had helped to nurse during the past four years.

The second time Lieutenant Wainwright opened his eyes, slowly and distinctly, like a child reciting a hard-earned lesson he is fearful of forgetting, he managed to whisper a single sentence.

The meaning of his words Mildred Thornton did not understand, nevertheless, they were graven upon her memory as no words had ever been:

“Germans, 11 A. M., July 15th.”

Afterwards Lieutenant Wainwright fell asleep, and this time with an expression of complete happiness and satisfaction, as if he had offered atonement for whatever his past weakness or sin.

But even before he slept, Mildred Thornton deserted her post, leaving the wounded officer for a few moments alone.

By command of Colonel Winfield all through the long day a minor officer had been patrolling up and down near the hospital trench in case of need.

As Colonel Winfield had also ordered that he be sent for immediately should Lieutenant Wainwright show any sign of being able to speak, Mildred requested he be notified that she would like to see him as soon as possible.

Then, with Lieutenant Wainwright's message still undelivered, she returned to his bedside and waited.

An hour passed and the dusk fell; strange and weird the effect here in this place of refuge underground. Lieutenant Wainwright did not wake again and Colonel Winfield did not appear.

Mildred Thornton had no idea of imparting the young officer's words to anyone save his Colonel. Had they not been of supreme importance Colonel Winfield, with so many other vital demands upon his time, would never have remained long hours by the wounded man.

Finally between seven and eight o'clock he came, Mildred's summons having only reached him a few moments before, as he had been busy at headquarters some distance off.

Standing there together, with only a flickering taper for light, and with no one else present and Lieutenant Wainwright still apparently asleep, Mildred Thornton delivered this message:

"Germans, 11 A. M., July 15th."

If she had not appreciated the significance of Lieutenant Wainwright's achievement, the look on his Colonel's face when she

explained that there could be no doubt the wounded officer had been thoroughly himself when he had spoken, was a sufficient revelation.

Colonel Winfield was a man past early middle age, with the face of the typical American officer, lean, brown and determined. Yet for an instant he grew white.

"Thank God!" he said in answer to Mildred. And then:

"If Lieutenant Wainwright's words are true, he has accomplished the greatest piece of secret information since the beginning of the war. In any case, he has earned the Distinguished Service War Cross. Indeed, there will be no honors that the Allies will not rejoice to pay him if he lives. And true or false he has made a supreme effort. But, Miss Thornton, I must trust you implicitly. Under no possible circumstances or conditions repeat to any one else what you have just told me. If you do, it may mean infinite misfortune to the Allies. Moreover, if Lieutenant Wainwright rallies again and is able to talk more freely, will you remember exactly

what he says, omitting and adding nothing? I am sure I can trust not only your fidelity, but your intelligence."

So, although Mildred found herself grown extremely tired after the strain of imparting Lieutenant Wainwright's information had been lifted, nevertheless she would not desert her patient for the night, when another nurse appeared to relieve her.

She slept a few hours on another cot nearby, while the new nurse kept watch, having promised to wake her, if the wounded officer moved or spoke.

Then, a little after midnight, waking of her own accord, she returned to her former vigil.

Yet there was no actual need, because Lieutenant Wainwright, having summoned his forces for the one effort, either slept on or continued unconscious from his injury.

The following morning, having learned to his amazement that the wounded officer upon whom he had operated, not only continued alive, but showed signs of improvement, Dr. Clark drove over a second time to the *poste de secours*. Soon after he

ordered both his patient and nurse transferred to his hospital.

Under present conditions being moved would do Lieutenant Wainwright no injury and he could receive far better care at the hospital. Moreover, every available space in the first-aid trenches might soon be required for other wounded.

So Mildred rode over in the ambulance beside her patient, who still made no effort to speak again, although he appeared now and then to be perfectly conscious.

Once at the hospital, however, by special permission, Mildred was given a twelve-hour leave from duty. To the best of her ability she slept almost the entire number of hours, rousing only once for food.

Afterwards she again took charge of Lieutenant Wainwright by request of Colonel Winfield and also because Dr. Clark desired her to continue the work she had begun.

"If the young man recovers, Miss Thornton, it will be due to your care, not mine," Dr. Clark insisted the morning after she had come back upon the case.

Mildred shook her head.

"I did absolutely nothing but sit still and watch; I made no other effort."

Dr. Clark remained unshaken in his opinion.

"You had faith when mind failed me, Miss Thornton, and faith is the great factor which no physician or nurse has the right to surrender until the end."

It chanced that the following evening Lieutenant Wainwright was able to tell a fairly connected story.

"Yes, I want you to report to Colonel Winfield at once, all I say. Certainly I am strong enough to talk. I must be; I may grow unconscious again, or I may not pull through."

So, as his cot was at the end of the row, with no one in attendance near save Mildred, the officer could speak to her without being overheard. If he were obliged to stop now and then for rest and a renewal of strength, there was never any confusion in his narrative.

"On the night after parting from you, Miss Thornton, dressed as a German and with a private soldier named Navara, I

swam across the Marne. On the other side at dawn we made straight for the German trenches because to have hesitated would have meant we would have been shot on sight. But moving directly forward and wearing German uniforms the enemy believed what we hoped they might believe, that we were German prisoners, escaping back to our own lines. Fortunately I had taken my story as well as my uniform from a German who was made prisoner a few days ago. When I was questioned by the Captain in charge of the German trench we made for, I told the other fellow's story. Navara did not talk except when he was forced, as his German was not as good as mine. He spoke more correctly perhaps, but I knew the colloquialisms, since I played and went to school with German children when I was a kid.

"After we convinced the officer and the soldiers that we were really escaped prisoners they were tremendously anxious to talk to us. They wanted to know all we could tell about the American troops. I

did my best, but here Navara got ahead of me as he had more imagination. Anyhow we both reported that the American soldiers were utterly untrained and would undoubtedly run as soon as things got hot. We did not seem able to feed the Huns enough of this kind of information. It was what they wanted to hear. Yet it was not what I had come for.

"In a way it was kind of pathetic how eager the Boches were to believe the Yanks were not up to scratch. I don't know, I may be wrong, but you can tell Colonel Winfield I think they are staking their last throw. If they lose this time, or even if they fail to win outright, the German army is finished. Once we start we can go straight to Berlin if we like. Only the thing I was sent over to find out was when the Germans planned to break through this salient. I had luck. The order came the first day. The attack would begin between Rheims and Verdun on July 15th, at 11 o'clock in the morning, French time and would move up along the whole line. This is what I told you?"

By this time Lieutenant Wainwright had become too exhausted to speak further. Mildred answered reassuringly, insisting that he wait half an hour before trying to go on, in spite of her own excitement and curiosity. Later she gave him nourishment to increase his strength.

But for the time being spiritual determination had lifted the wounded officer beyond the limitations of physical weakness. Not until he had been able to report his experiences in full did he feel that he could make the effort to recover.

"I have not much more to tell, so let me go on," he pleaded when a half hour was past. "That same night after the order had been given Navara and I tried to get away. Our hope was that one or the other of us would succeed. We had no thought that we would both make it. I seem to have been the fortunate one; I am afraid Navara was taken prisoner. We separated and went different ways thinking this showed better judgment as one of us might escape. I got to the bridge I had been ordered to blow up if possible, and though

I did what I could I am not sure I succeeded. The main thing seemed to me to get back home with my information."

Unconsciously Lieutenant Wainwright used the word "home" in referring to the French country which was at present the post of duty for him and many thousands of Americans.

"Getting across the river I seem to have been struck by nearly everything that could come my way, yet somehow I swam on. After I crawled up in the mud on our side the river I don't remember anything more."

Then Lieutenant Wainwright was silent as if his story were ended.

Mildred believed he had fallen asleep, but when she had gotten up intending to move away, he added:

"What day of the month is it?"

Mildred answered, "July 13th." Then he smiled with unconquerable American humor.

"It is a day of bad luck for some one; I wonder for whom?" Afterwards, turning over, he sank into a really comfortable sleep.

CHAPTER XII

Château-Thierry

FATE was either with or against Bianca Zoli.

The promise which Sonya had made concerning her to Carlo Navara on the night of his farewell, she had every wish and every intention of fulfilling.

It was not Bianca's opposition which thwarted her intention, but a combination of circumstances.

As a matter of fact, although Bianca pleaded and protested, insisting that she did understand the perils she might soon be forced to face, and notwithstanding preferred to meet them, she did not defy Sonya's expressed command.

Moreover, Bianca was of course influenced by Carlo's interest and the knowledge that his thought had been for her at the moment of his own greatest danger. The news that Carlo had accompanied Lieutenant Wain-

wright as a spy into the German lines she received with more outward display of emotion than she had ever before revealed. She even showed anger and wounded feeling toward Sonya herself, insisting that she should have been told at once of Carlo's intention and been allowed to see him the night of his farewell.

Nevertheless, Bianca made ready her few personal possessions and was prepared to leave for Paris at any moment a proper escort could be arranged for her. In Paris she was to be under the protection of the Red Cross and there to await the developments of the next few weeks of war.

But no escort was found for Bianca, and on the morning of July 15th Marshal Foch forestalled the enemy by launching a surprise attack that disrupted the plans of the Germans.

From this moment all civilian travel in the war area became impossible.

Moreover, Marshal Foch started his counter-offensive at ten o'clock—one hour before the German assault on the allied lines had been timed to take place.

Immediately after the flames of war moved up the line toward the old battleground of Château-Thierry and the upper reaches of the Marne.

With his companies of United States marines and a few French troops General Bundy was hourly awaiting his moment to strike. It was as if the last act of the greatest drama in human history was now beginning and each actor awaited his cue from the great prompter behind the scenes.

The knowledge that this fight was probably the beginning of the end was felt by every soldier engaged on either side.

It was small wonder that at the hospital near Thierry, Bianca Zoli and her individual fate had been well-nigh forgotten.

As a matter of fact she was not actually forgotten by her guardian, but other responsibilities at the time so absorbed every moment of Sonya's time and every ounce of her energy, that she had none to spare for Bianca.

After concluding that she was glad Bianca had not attempted the trip back to Paris under present conditions, but was under the

protection of the hospital, she dismissed the subject from her mind.

However, she did not do this until she had arranged that Bianca be outside the hospital as much as possible during the days when it would be most crowded with the wounded and dying.

There was every character of work to be done for the soldiers; it was therefore not necessary that in order to be useful Bianca need witness certain sights, be aware of the full measure of toll paid to the God of War.

An acquaintance of Sonya's with a dozen American college girls as her assistants, having established a Red Cross canteen for the soldiers at the distance of a short walk from the hospital, Sonya had asked that Bianca be allowed to help with this work.

She would thus have pleasant associates near her own age and be away from the great strain at the hospital.

And Bianca had agreed.

Indeed, after learning through Lieutenant Wainwright's story to Mildred, that Carlo Navara had probably either been taken

prisoner or killed, Bianca found herself strangely and unexpectedly indifferent to the way in which she occupied her time. Of course she still wished to be as useful as possible, yet she seemed to have lost the old zest and enthusiasm.

She had never had much hope for Carlo from the moment Sonya had delivered his message. She believed Carlo wholly unfit for the mission he had undertaken. Her regret was always that she had not been able to see him, in order to persuade him to her own point of view. Sonya's influence had always been to fire Carlo to heroic deeds for which he was not in the least suited, but which he always hoped might in some fashion inspire Sonya with love of him. Bianca believed her own influence a far more sensible and restraining one. Naturally she would not have wished Carlo to be a coward, but to undertake a military duty for which he was wholly unfit was not courage but recklessness.

From actual experience Bianca knew of Carlo's inability to conceal his emotions. As a spy he would not only betray himself

in this fashion, but a number of others. Certainly nothing could be more unteutonic than his appearance, while his knowledge of German had been acquired only for use in his music.

Then Lieutenant Wainwright's story to Mildred Thornton had justified Bianca's worst fears.

For a little time she continued to hope, but when no word of any kind came concerning Carlo's fate and Marshal Foch's great drive started the German retreat beyond Rheims, Bianca could only decide that her hope had little foundation in fact.

She had not appreciated how fond she had grown to be of Carlo during the weeks in which he had insisted upon confiding to her his own hopeless affection for Sonya, depending upon her sympathy and advice. But then she and Carlo, even if their temperaments were so unlike, had many things in common. Carlo's parents had been Italians, although he was himself an American, and her mother was an Italian. Moreover, Bianca had spent all the years of her early life in Italy, knowing nothing of her American father for many years.

In a way Carlo had probably come to take the place of her Italian foster-brothers, who had been like her own brothers during her childhood.

And certainly he was kinder, for after Eugino Zoli's death in Italy, Paulo had never troubled to write to his foster-sister whom he had promised his mother to care for always.

So Bianca was extraordinarily unhappy and for once in her life felt the need of a confidant.

She was wounded and grieved with Sonya, and also Sonya had no time to devote to her. Unfortunately this was also true of Bianca's older Red Cross friends. Nevertheless, it was purely an accident that Bianca's choice should have fallen upon Anne Karen. As a matter of fact she was too unhappy to show her usual discretion, and Anne, happening to share the room and bed next her own, Bianca had poured forth the full story of her affection for Carlo and the fate which had probably overtaken him.

But Bianca was not aware that instead

of exciting sympathy in Anne, the older girl was even a little amused by her unconscious betrayal of herself. At least it was Anne Karen's opinion that it was Bianca's affection for Carlo Navara which explained her attitude of indifference toward other persons, yet, instead of being pleased by this fact, Anne confessed to herself that she was vaguely annoyed. In any case it would be entertaining to see Bianca descend from her cool indifference and appearance of superiority to revealing ordinary human weakness.

One morning on the 17th of July, Bianca left the hospital for her work at the canteen a little later than usual.

Beginning at daylight an extraordinary number of people had stopped at the hospital so that Bianca had assisted in receiving them.

They were not alone wounded soldiers, but several civilians engaged upon important war service. One of them chanced to be a newspaper correspondent, who begged permission to remain at the hospital for the next few days. He appeared to have inside

information that the second stage of Foch's offensive would begin now at any hour and wished to write his story from the hospital.

Bianca had remained with him long enough to secure a few moments of private conversation. Since he appeared to know more of the war than any one else she had thus far met, she wanted to ask him the fate of Germany's war prisoners. Afterwards, on her way to the canteen, Bianca decided that his answer had not been sufficiently reassuring to justify her waiting. There was one hope, however, which he did hold out.

Further southeast, where Marshal Foch had launched the beginning of his offensive, the Germans were retreating. Yet their retreat was orderly and so far they were driving their prisoners with them. If later their retreat should become more of a rout, there was a chance that a few prisoners might manage to slip back into their own lines.

All day as she worked at the canteen Bianca had to fortify herself with this small

comfort. Yet as a matter of fact she had no absolute knowledge that Carlo had been taken prisoner; since there was an equal reason to believe he had been shot on the night he had attempted, together with Lieutenant Wainwright, to make his escape.

However, Bianca had enough of the allied war spirit not to betray her own depression during her hours of work.

Soon after agreeing to assist at the canteen she had become an unusual favorite with the college girls who were her companions. They were all several years older than Bianca and it rather amused them that Bianca should appear so efficient and free from mental or physical nervousness, when everybody else, soldiers and civilian workers alike in this particular neighborhood, were enduring the very limit of human strain. It was the hour of final waiting before action which is always so difficult.

However, Bianca worked at the canteen as she had at the hospital and on board the hospital ship. She was quiet, moved quickly and could always be depended upon not to reveal either excitement or fatigue.

Moreover, she looked like a lovely wax doll in her Red Cross uniform, with her pale clear skin, her large calm dark eyes and the fair hair which never seemed to become ruffled and disarranged like most girls'.

She talked to the men and boys she served at the canteen in a simple and direct fashion, not volunteering any particular information, but oftentimes giving them extremely good advice when they put certain questions to her.

Indeed, one of the men who came to the canteen every day about noon and insisted upon being served by Bianca, had called her by the joking title of "Little Sister to the Marines." In this particular neighborhood one talked about telling things to "Little Sister" these days, rather than to the marines themselves.

On July 17th, as Bianca had arrived at the canteen a little later than usual, she insisted upon continuing to work without fifteen minutes, intermission for rest.

There seemed an even greater number of soldiers than usual who wished to be served with sandwiches, or chocolate, or coffee,

whatever was at hand. One seldom complained of one's *ménu* during these wonderful days in France.

Besides, all day in the little Red Cross hut, which had formerly been the home of a French peasant, but now served as a canteen house, Bianca could hear the tramping of soldiers, marching one knew not to what exact point, but always toward Château-Thierry. Also one could nearly always catch the distant thunder of guns as the battle moved further up the line from Rheims toward Soissons.

About five o'clock in the afternoon Bianca chanced to be standing at a small table alone. At this hour the canteen was fairly deserted, but she noticed a marine enter the hut, stop and hesitate at the door for a moment and then walk up toward her.

"I thought I would know you," he began. "Of course you have not noticed me although I have been into the canteen several times. I remembered you because of the name I have heard given you."

Thinking he desired something to eat, Bianca drew out a small camp chair, presenting it to him hospitably.

"There isn't a great deal of food left, but I am sure I can find you something," she suggested. "Indeed I have a little chocolate and a few sandwiches in my knapsack which I brought over from the hospital and have been saving till everything else had given out."

The marine shook his head.

"No," he said "I am sorry. I would like to stay and have something to eat more than most anything I know, but I haven't a minute. I ought not to be here now, only some one asked me to bring you this note and said it was most important. I kind of thought I would like to do a favor for 'Little Sister.' I must be off, I have a report to make further on."

Handing Bianca a crumpled envelope, before she had time to glance at it, the marine disappeared.

As Bianca stared at the envelope she thought that the handwriting looked extremely irregular and uncertain. It was not from Sonya, but who else could have written her?

Bianca was really very tired and when

one is tired one's judgment is seldom to be relied upon.

Bianca opened the note and read, scrawled across a piece of paper these words:

"I was made prisoner, but escaped. I am now in a house in Château-Thierry—the one house standing near the old church. Am seriously hurt. Bring help if you can before it is too late.

"CARLO."

The note was absurd and on the face of it both impossible and untrue, nevertheless, Bianca did not appreciate this. It was here that Carlo Navara's estimate of her character proved correct, since no American girl would have been deceived for a moment by the receipt of such a note.

The village of Château-Thierry was at present almost a No Man's Land, since it lay between the opposing armies and was a place of almost continuous bombardment. Even if Carlo had managed to escape into the village and was in hiding, there would have been no possibility of his having delivered a note to a United States marine.

But Bianca did not think of this, indeed

she thought of nothing that was in the least sensible or intelligent. Simply because the note stated the fact she believed that it had been written by Carlo Navara. Besides, who else whom she knew had undertaken a secret mission and had failed? But even if he were hurt and had failed, nevertheless Carlo was alive!

Suddenly Bianca felt happier than she had since the news of Carlo's parting farewell to Sonya. With this change in her emotions came a soft flooding of light, as if a curtain had been abruptly drawn from a wide window letting into a darkened chamber the brilliant rays of the sun.

Now Bianca decided that her affection for Carlo had been deeper than she dreamed.

One must remember that Bianca Zoli, both through her birth and training, was an extraordinary contradiction; in spite of her childish manner and appearance, which so puzzled other persons, she was in reality far older emotionally than most girls of the same age.

Her one impulse was to find Carlo as soon as possible and do what she could for him.

An example of her strange contradiction was the stupidity and the wisdom oddly mingled in her behavior during the following tragic and glorious hours.

Instead of returning to the hospital at once for advice and help and a possible explanation of the mysterious summons in which she had placed her faith, Bianca actually started off alone down the road which led to the village of Château-Thierry.

As this was the hour when Bianca's work at the canteen closed for the day no one was surprised by her departure.

CHAPTER XIII

Before the Attack

IT was a fact that Bianca Zoli was too absorbed in her own desire and also too ignorant to recognize the enormity of her attempt to enter the town of Château-Thierry.

As she started along the road toward the town, she was not even aware that there was actually less traffic, less indication of military preparation than in many weeks, although an occasional motor truck rolled past loaded with supplies or ammunition.

Now and then a few refugees hurried from the opposite direction, carrying particularly prized possessions and looking as if they had already delayed too long and feared for their final safety.

Yet Bianca had no thought of danger, and this was one of the evidences of the contradiction of her nature, because she was not exceptionally brave. In this

respect she was childlike, since she was more unconscious of danger than careless of it. If one had asked Bianca for her impression at the beginning of her pilgrimage she would merely have replied that there seemed to be less noise of firing in the neighborhood than in several days.

Nevertheless, on each side of the road which finally entered Château-Thierry from the west, the United States marines were on guard, tense, watchful and silent.

If Bianca had observed them with any interest, which apparently she did not, she would have discovered that their usual gaiety and good humor, all their essentially youthful qualities, had for the time being vanished. These marines were men unwavering, stanch, awaiting the greatest hour of their lives.

And yet Bianca was actually allowed to pass between them for a short distance in her journey. This seeming miracle was due to the Red Cross uniform she wore.

For many months, in fact since their arrival in France, the American army had been growing accustomed to seeing Ameri-

can women, in uniforms of the Red Cross and other organizations, pass in and out among them as quietly and steadfastly at work upon their tasks as if they were soldiers. They were in Paris, they were in the devastated areas throughout France, they were in every little village, where matters of organization, of ordnance and quartermaster supplies had to be looked after. They were doing telephone and telegraph as well as clerical work, they were cooking and serving food, trying to heal the sick. Indeed they were at every occupation demanded by the military life save the actual fighting, and were in every place even the trenches and near the actual fields of battle, when their Red Cross nursing required it.

So as Bianca walked along for the first half mile or more, not one of the sentries stopped her. She appeared intent upon some errand of importance, probably making for a place of shelter.

Each morning as Bianca left the hospital for the canteen she took with her such provisions as the matron of the hospital

was able to contribute to the canteen supplies. Today it chanced that she had not removed the full amount from her knapsack, holding back a small portion until it should be needed. And later, when Bianca left the hut as a matter of habit she had picked up the knapsack, forgetting it still contained provisions.

Finally however, she came to a place in the road where a sentry stopped her.

"No one is permitted to pass this point," he explained.

Moreover he showed extreme amazement over Bianca's appearance.

It was scarcely a sentry's privilege to offer comment or advice, but at present he seemed only to remember that he was an American boy and Bianca a girl in a place of the gravest danger.

In the first place it was very puzzling.

"Try and get as far away from this neighborhood as you can before dawn," he protested. It was not possible that he should say anything more under the circumstances. But afterwards as Bianca turned to retrace her steps, the sentry

thought of the situation with both alarm and annoyance.

He had sisters of his own in the United States, one of them was actually serving somewhere in France, yet never from the first had he approved of this nearness of young girls to the battle-line. Now it actually took one's breath away to think what might happen at any hour not many miles from his post of duty. Whoever the girl in the Red Cross uniform might be and whatever her errand, it was madness that she should have ventured even to this point. At any moment a bomb might be dropped along the road or a stray shell choose her for its victim.

Returning Bianca at least congratulated herself that she had not confided her desire to the sentry, since even she was beginning to realize in a measure the difficulty of her enterprise.

Perhaps one can hardly accept the fact, yet nevertheless it was true that Bianca had no conception of the peculiar military conditions in the neighborhood of the town of Château-Thierry. She knew of course

that there had been a great deal of fighting in this vicinity and that the Germans had driven the French away from their own town. She did not know there was any reason to think the village might soon become the scene of another historic battle, nor that it lay like a longed-for prize between the opposing armies, each ready to snatch it from the other at the moment of greatest opportunity.

Bianca had seen other devastated villages and was under the impression that Château-Thierry was like the others. She was really extremely ignorant of actual military conditions, in spite of her nearness to the scene of action and of all the conversation that went on about her.

But Bianca was one of the persons who see things only in miniature, and there are many more of them than we dream. This was why she was successful in small matters; she saw only one thing at a time.

Yet Bianca, in spite of her stupidity, possessed a trait of character which oftentimes succeeds when cleverness fails. She possessed a perfectly unconquerable determination.

Had she undertaken a journey to the planet Mars on this July night, it would seem to have been more simply accomplished than to have entered the town of Château-Thierry, once a peaceful, hospitable little village of seven thousand inhabitants.

Yet insanely convinced that Carlo was there and needing her, and in spite of hurrying on toward the hospital, worried with the fear that her absence had been discovered, Bianca had not given up.

She had not been more than three-quarters of an hour, yet she felt afraid her appearance alone would create more attention than it formerly had. It was true that she had to explain several times that she was on her way back to the hospital and if uninterrupted would reach there within a short time.

She now walked along a little footpath by the side of the road; the dusk had not yet fallen on this historic night.

Suddenly Bianca came upon a large motor truck covered with tarpaulin which was standing along the roadside. The

motor driver and the soldier who was accompanying him, having both climbed down from their places, were discussing some question with the sentry who was guarding the road at this particular place.

Partly from curiosity Bianca paused for a moment on the opposite side of the truck where she was safely hidden from observation.

She was a small figure almost completely concealed, nevertheless she was near enough to overhear the conversation between the three men.

"It is a cinch, Bill, we have got to get her close up to the village of Château-Thierry tonight behind our own lines. We have been delayed before this and since we have a supply of ammunition that may be needed pretty soon, I intend to get the old truck there if I have to hitch up and drag her in myself."

The voice had a decided Yankee drawl, which a few months before might have had a strange sound here in the French countryside, but had grown familiar since then. Moreover, if the voice in itself were

not pleasing, there was a note of efficiency in it which under the circumstances could not have been disagreeable.

"If you will stand guard while my friend and I have a little feed, I think we will be able to persuade her to go on of her own accord a little later," the driver added.

"But Bianca had scarcely heard anything save the name of the town of Château-Thierry, and the fact that the truck was to be taken in that direction. She of course did not know to what definite spot, nor had she the intelligence to grasp the importance of the rest of the man's speech.

Afterwards, when the sentry nodded his acceptance of the responsibility of temporarily guarding the truck, the motor driver and his companion, moving a few paces away on the opposite side of the road, sat down to eat the food they had brought along in their pockets.

Then the sentry began walking slowly back and forth.

He should have observed Bianca, but as a matter of fact he did not. His mind was very full of the thought of the coming

hours. No word of what was in their minds had been exchanged by the three men, yet each one knew just why every carload of ammunition, every truck containing supplies, every gun and every man should be in the position arranged for them on this night of nights.

The sentry had turned his back and was walking away when Bianca first moved. She had always possessed an extraordinary quickness and quietness of movement. In an instant she had climbed up inside the truck and was hidden behind the tarpaulin.

Fortunately for Bianca's purpose the rear of the truck was not crowded and she was able to seat herself on a small square case, which happened to contain powder, but of this Bianca was happily ignorant.

She sat there an hour perhaps while the driver and soldier worked with the motor. Then the journey began. Incredible as it may seem, Bianca was actually started upon an adventure which had appeared an absolute impossibility a short time before.

The length of the journey, nor its actual direction she never appreciated. Now and

then the driver of the truck was stopped, but he must have given the password or explained his mission, for always he was allowed to drive on.

Bianca may even have slept a little. She was much shaken and exhausted and now and then faintly appreciated the madness of her errand. However, there was no way now of turning back. She was frightened to have allowed the driver of the truck or the soldier to discover her. When daylight came she would at least be near the town of Château-Thierry and in the daylight everything appeared simpler.

But a little before midnight the motor truck halted.

Later Bianca heard voices. Afterwards the voices moved away and Bianca looked out. She found the motor truck standing with a long line of other trucks and camions. Before them was a barricade of sandbags. Afterwards Bianca actually crawled out and hid herself within the barricade.

CHAPTER XIV

The Attack

FOR a few hours Bianca slept fitfully. Now and then she awakened when the thunder of the guns seemed nearer. But she had grown extraordinarily accustomed to the noises of war in the past few weeks.

Just before dawn, however, Bianca came to a complete consciousness. Something must have warned her that she was awakening upon the scene on the morning of the battle which was to prove the Gettysburg of the world war.

By accident Bianca Zoli was in hiding near the bank of the river and not far from Château-Thierry, where more than one division of American troops had been straining at the leash for weeks, awaiting under wise generalship, the command to go forward.

This morning, before dawn, the command had come.

But Bianca was not at present in the immediate battle area, fortunately for her she was in a protected space where a reserve of ammunition was being held.

Nevertheless, her eyes were to behold a spectacle which many of us would gladly have suffered her danger to be allowed to witness.

From her surprising hiding place Bianca first seemed to be aware of the measured tramping of thousands of feet. Then at some distance off she beheld a company of marines, moving up in field service khaki, carrying rifles and with the letters U. S. M. C. on their knapsacks.

Under their helmets in the pale dawn their faces were grave and stern. These men were modern crusaders and this their first chance to show the mettle of which they were made.

Farther off to the left a party of gunners went by dragging several machine guns into new positions. A small troop of cavalry swept past.

Over on the farther side of Château-Thierry the Germans were again at work,

pouring shot and shell into the once peaceful little fortified town. A large force of German infantry under support of powerful artillery concentrations and under cover of smoke screens was trying to thrust its way forward.

But closer at hand the American artillery was already replying, while the United States marines had started forward on the journey to Berlin.

From her strange hiding-place Bianca was in a kind of trance, too stunned by the noises about her, too interested by the sights she beheld, to have any thought of self.

Long hours she seemed to watch and wait. After a time no more men went by and, except for the sounds of the battle close at hand, she would not have known she was in the danger zone.

Finally Bianca even crept out of her hiding-place and walked beyond the barricade of sandbags which had so far afforded her protection.

She stood facing the north, not conscious at first that she was looking toward

Château-Thierry, but knowing that this was the direction in which she had seen the marines advancing.

Afterwards, Bianca moved forward, a pathetic, even an absurd figure if any human eyes had beheld her. After a time she believed she beheld the ruined spires of the ancient church of Château-Thierry still at some distance away. Above the village there was a great gray cloud of heavy smoke.

She had no definite plan in mind; dazed and trembling, aware that some great drama of the war was taking place about her and yet not knowing what it was, Bianca could not even consider what she should do.

Like a little leaf she had been caught up in a great hurricane and although for the present she had been left to wait in a quiet spot, in another moment she would doubtless be caught up and swept on.

If the soldiers who were guarding the ammunition supplies not far off caught sight of the figure of the young American girl in her uniform of a Red Cross worker,

no one of them came near her. Possibly they were too absorbed by their own duties, or else too engrossed with the thought of what this day's fighting might bring forth. It might even have been true that observing her, Bianca would at the time have appeared more like a vision than a reality.

Later in the day Red Cross nurses in aprons and caps were to work among the wounded in the field hospitals at the very edge of the battlefield, but Bianca was alone, with no hospital in the vicinity and no companion and apparently no purpose.

It occurred to Bianca that now conditions about her were comparatively quiet she might make the attempt to return to the hospital, or at least she might make the start. She had no thought of being able to reach the hospital alive, realizing that the road and countryside would be equally congested with troops and guns and with ambulances filled with the wounded and dying. Moreover, at any moment of her journey she might be caught within a barrage.

Oddly Bianca felt a sense of quiet resigna-

tion to fate which comes to some natures in moments of supreme peril. It was also a kind of fatalism. If her own folly and stupidity had brought her into so great danger she must meet the situation with whatever fortitude and philosophy she could summon.

At last she was beginning to doubt whether the note she had received so mysteriously the afternoon before had ever been written by Carlo Navara. Was it possible that Carlo could be concealed in Château-Thierry, a town if not actually occupied by the Germans, at least held by them? If this were true how could he have written her, or sent her a note with a United States marine as his messenger?

As Bianca kept her dark eyes turned toward the little town, which the United States marines were even now entering, slowly the mists created by her own stupidity began to clear.

She knew now that if by one chance in a thousand Carlo Navara had managed to elude his captors and to be in hiding in Château-Thierry, nevertheless he would

never even in illness have made so mad a request. Bianca might as easily have been asked to join him in a city beyond the veil of this world.

Notwithstanding, Bianca moved slowly forward and in the direction of the little town of Château-Thierry. This was not altogether madness, a vague idea did possess her. Back of the idea was the invincible faith that before many hours the town would be held by the American troops. When this occurred there would be work which she could do, services for the wounded which she could render, while to wait here through the long day and night and perhaps many more hours would be equally dangerous.

German planes were even now, with the breaking of day, flying overhead in an effort to destroy the enemy's reserve of ammunition. A single shell might wreck the long line of cars and trucks not far from her hiding place.

Therefore, incredible as it may sound, alone Bianca crept forward, following the direction the marines had taken.

By this time the dawn had broken and although the sky was a bright rose, beneath it hung the clouds of smoke.

And now all the world had become a vast pandemonium of incredible sounds, a thousand guns shrieking at once, shells bursting, rifles sounding an endless rat, tat, tat.

As Bianca moved along she was stupefied both by the noise and through terror. Sometimes for a few yards the ground ahead entirely clear, then again she would seem to be passing through a kind of hail of bullets that tapped the ground about her, as the German artillery from some distance off made the effort to locate the oncoming of the American reserves.

Very absurdly Bianca kept her head lowered and her eyes on the ground as one instinctively does in a hailstorm. Occasionally she glanced up, but only after a shell had whizzed over her.

Bianca's only clear purpose now was to reach a shelter of some kind; here where there was only open country death was inevitable. A miracle had preserved her so

far. But inside the town Bianca believed there must be some place where she could hide until the fury of the battle was past.

Blindly she struggled on.

In the heart of Château-Thierry even at an early hour of the day, the German tide was now beginning to roll back, but very slowly, almost imperceptibly for the present.

Yet already the Germans had encountered their initial surprise. They were face to face with the United States marines whom they had been told would never fight, because they were too untrained and had too much to lose and too little to gain in this battle upon a foreign soil.

But instead of untrained, raw recruits the German soldiers had discovered heroic, gallant men, men in whose stern eyes there was no sign that they would ever accept defeat.

It chanced that when Bianca Zoli, reached the town of Château-Thierry, the little street she entered had been cleared of all fighting.

As directly as if she had been familiar with the little town, instead of coming into

it for the first time in her life, Bianca made for the ruins of the great church, which before its destruction had been as magnificent as a Cathedral. This was not remarkable, because the ruins were more conspicuous than any other in the same quarter of the village. Moreover, Bianca had a fairly clear idea in mind. She had spent the greater part of her youth in Italy and was familiar with the arrangement of most Latin churches. A crypt would doubtless be under the ruins, so that if she could manage to make her way in safety to this, she could find no more secure hiding-place.

The streets were littered with dreadful things, but Bianca went steadfastly on. During their occupation of the village the Germans had dragged every private possession out of both the small homes and the great, strewing the sidewalks and the roadway with them. Paintings had been ripped from walls, china and glass smashed and furniture broken into bits.

When the young Red Cross worker finally reached the great church she found it almost demolished. The roof had partly fallen, and the beautiful altar was ruined.

Bianca's soul grew sick as well as her mind and body, and yet she had been right, there was a great vault underneath the church which appeared to be empty.

Stumbling down the stone steps which led to it, the young girl crouched on the floor in almost complete darkness, remaining there for several hours almost without stirring while the noises of the battle continued. Yet now the thunder of the guns was more subdued, the shrieking of the shells less ear splitting.

Just how the time passed Bianca had no knowledge. Afterwards she believed that she might never have come out of the experience and kept her sanity save for an unexpected incident.

She must have been in hiding for the greater part of the day and had become convinced from the deathlike silence inside the crypt, in such strange contrast to the outer noises, that she was entirely alone.

Afterwards, when she was perhaps partly dozing or else halfway unconscious from fear and fatigue, Bianca received the impression that she had heard the faintest

movement, a movement so slight that for the first moment she conceived there must be a frightened animal who had also taken refuge in the crypt.

A few moments later, the sound growing more insistent, Bianca found herself nearly fainting from terror. During her inconceivable journey into Château-Thierry on the morning of the great battle she had felt nothing approaching this character of fear. Death may be so much kinder than many other things. Actually she had not been so afraid of death as she had always believed she would be.

But indeed for a little time she became almost insensible to any emotion. And then Bianca saw her companion.

In several hours she had grown accustomed to the dim light. Now half walking, half crawling toward her was a young French girl, so terribly weak and emaciated that apparently she was unable to stand upright.

She had been aware of Bianca's entrance into the crypt and during the hours they had been in hiding together, had been

summoning the courage to seek her companionship. Another girl like herself would do her no injury.

Bianca learned that the young French girl, instead of leaving with the other inhabitants who had been ordered to evacuate the city at the approach of the invader, had remained in hiding in the crypt of the church, and had managed to keep herself alive with a few crusts of bread.

Now for the first time Bianca remembered that she had a little food in her knapsack and a bottle of water which she never failed to carry with her. And because Bianca had found some one who was in a more tragic condition and greater need than herself she not only gave the other girl a small amount of food and water, but made an equal effort to regain her own strength.

CHAPTER XV

Inside the Hospital

BIANCA'S absence from her usual place in the Red Cross hospital for more than twenty-four hours passed almost without notice.

In her prediction that the day might come when she would be too engrossed with other responsibilities to think of Bianca, Sonya Clark had reasoned wisely. However, her appeal to Nona Davis and to Mildred Thornton to take upon themselves her neglected duty when the hour should arrive, unfortunately was not answered. And this was from no intentional neglect and scarcely through any fault of theirs, but because the night and day of Bianca's disappearance chanced to be the greatest in modern history, and for the workers in the Red Cross hospital near the now historic battleground of Château-Thierry perhaps the most strenuous in their lives.

On the evening of Bianca's failure to return from the canteen, Sonya was engaged in making arrangements for the reception of more than a dozen wounded men who had just been brought in by motor ambulances from the fighting area further south and east along the Marne. Among them were several German prisoners.

Until long past midnight devoting every moment of her time to their care, Sonya thought of nothing else. Then, in the hours between midnight and dawn, word was received at the hospital that the great attack at Thierry was soon to begin. The hospital was made ready to receive as many of the wounded as it could possibly accommodate.

From this moment no worker inside the hospital, from the youngest of the orderlies to the greatest of the surgeons, dreamed of an hour of rest.

The day for which they had been waiting so long having arrived, these men and women, wearing the Sign of the Cross, the healers of the nations, were equally ready with the soldiers to give their utmost.

So it was small wonder that Bianca was forgotten. There was, however, one person who noted her absence, an acquaintance who would scarcely have been expected to be as interested as her closer friends. This was Anne Karen whose acquaintance Bianca had made first at Sonya's wedding reception and later during the crossing from the United States to France.

Nevertheless, in spite of Anne's advances, the younger girl had never cared for the older.

There was no possibility of Bianca's temperament being liked or understood by many persons. Some time before, in her first acquaintance with Nona Davis in Italy, Bianca had aroused a hostility in Nona only less intense than she had recently excited in Anne Karen. The circumstances perhaps even bore a slight resemblance, since Nona and Bianca had both cared for the young Italian aviator, Eugino Zoli, Bianca's foster brother. Yet at present Bianca was certainly not interested in the American aviator, Captain Preston, whom she had amused and piqued by her lack of

interest. During the one call he had made at the hospital since the visit of the four girls to the American aviation camp, Anne herself had been able to observe this fact. Therefore, if Anne were interested in Captain Preston she had no reason for jealousy so far as Bianca was concerned. Yet since human nature is so seldom logical, Bianca's state of mind irritated Anne. In this world one seldom likes to admire what other persons fail to consider of importance.

However, the real difficulty lay in Anne Karen's undeveloped emotional nature, with its prompt yielding to an impulse like an ill-regulated child.

Having received the news of Carlo Navara's dangerous mission and later of his disappearance, Bianca had made no effort to conceal her anxiety and then her unhappiness. Why should she, since she believed her feeling for Carlo that of a younger sister?

Nevertheless, Anne Karen had become inspired with a perverse desire to discover to what extent a nature, apparently as cool and calm upon the surface as Bianca Zoli's,

would betray itself in the pursuit of a really deep affection.

When evening came and Bianca did not return at the usual hour from her work at the canteen it was Anne Karen who had reason to feel concern. She made several inquiries concerning Bianca's whereabouts among members of the staff of the hospital, but no one had seen or heard of the younger girl and were too occupied for discussion. Bianca must of course be engaged with work of some kind for the soldiers, since at present there was no other possible employment for one's time or energy that could be conceived of.

Later, Anne also became so absorbed in the increasing demands upon her strength that she too temporarily forgot Bianca. Only once when she did think of the younger girl again, it was with the conviction that Bianca was probably by this time safely in bed, since less was required of her at the hospital than of a graduate Red Cross nurse, even in hours of greatest emergency.

During the day that followed the night of warning and of preparation, the hospital

near the battleground of Château-Thierry became crowded with wounded soldiers as one hopes no hospital may ever be taxed again.

All day streams of Red Cross ambulances moved along the road, bearing the wounded from the field-hospitals nearer the battle-front. The fact that there was one field-hospital to each division of United States troops made no difference in the crowding, for in all the long four years of war there had been no more bitter or savage fighting than in this engagement between the American, French and German troops. Before the coming of another day, they were to have gauged each other's measure forever.

To Sonya Clark, in the same twenty-four hours, the strength and passion and enthusiasm of her early youth enjoyed a new birth.

Whatever her failures as a nurse in times past, due to a too intense personal sympathy, in these hours she redeemed. And this not because her sympathy failed, but because she too became as uplifted, as heroic as the soldiers whom she had the honor to serve.

There had been times when Sonya had hoped the opportunity would come when she might be able to prove her ability as a nurse to her husband. But now all personal considerations were forgotten.

All her life Sonya had blindly searched for the expression of a pure idealism. This had been responsible for her breaking away from the aristocratic life to which she was born as a member of the Russian nobility, in order to join groups of revolutionary thinkers in Russia long before the overthrow of the late Czar. Yet, however pure the Russian ideal, their action had never satisfied Sonya.

Now, in the unconscious idealism of these young American boys, the greater number of them members of the marines corps who won the day at Château-Thierry, she found at last what her nature so long had sought in vain.

Sonya seemed to bear a part in every detail of the hospital work during the twenty-four hours of greatest strain. She it was who assisted with several of the most critical operations; who was at the

bedside of the dying to receive their last words. There was never one soldier who expressed a regret for the life he had given in the divine cause of human freedom. Through the day and night Sonya's feet and heart had wings.

Moreover, toward nightfall after the fury of the first day's fighting was over, the wounded brought with them their own message of cheer. The Huns were already on the run. The last syllable in the long title of Armageddon was at last being written. Within the next twenty-four hours the world would learn that Paris was saved, and not only Paris but France and the world.

Once passing Sonya as she stood at the bedside of a wounded soldier, Dr. Clark glanced for an instant at his wife, wondering at her strange beauty and distinction in the midst of the sorrow and strain and fatigue surrounding her. He even had a moment of personal emotion. Had he been fair in marrying so charming a woman after so brief an acquaintance, with the uncertainty that she could ever care for him as deeply as he cared for her?

But Sonya had only stopped at this bedside because another Red Cross nurse had asked her attention.

It was Louise Roberts, who also had made a failure of her work aboard the hospital ship *Consolation*, but since had been doing her best to retrieve the past.

Yet if Sonya's failure as a Red Cross nurse had seemed to be due to a human sympathy which was apt to reveal itself in physical weakness, Louise Roberts' difficulty had been of an entirely opposite nature. Her nursing had been too automatic, too unsympathetic and professional. She behaved as if human beings were machines, who after a certain amount of careful and scientific treatment, must respond to what was required of them.

Therefore, Sonya was surprised by the expression in Louise Roberts' dark eyes as she turned them toward her.

"Mrs. Clark, I wish to ask you a favor," she demanded, speaking quietly, but with strong evidence of controlled emotion. "If it is possible will you see that I am allowed to spend the next few hours without being

disturbed? By accident I have just discovered that one of my patients is a very old friend. I think he will scarcely live more than a few hours."

If Sonya did nothing more than promise Louise that her wish should be respected, nevertheless, she guessed that she was witnessing the closing of another human drama.

Lying on his cot with a sheet drawn up over his entire body, Sonya had observed a face of almost unearthly beauty, fair and delicate as a woman's and in strange contrast to Louise Roberts' brilliant, dark coloring.

Yet there was no question of the friendship, or of some deeper affection, which must once have existed between them. The wounded soldier had eyes for no one save Louise, while her expression had changed as Sonya could scarcely have believed possible.

As Sonya moved away, Louise knelt down and entirely unconscious that she was in the midst of a ward filled with the wounded and with nurses and physicians going about their duties, she touched the

young man's cheek with caressing fingers as a mother might have done a sick child's.

"Tell me, John, when you can, how you happen to be over here in the fight? Remember when we said good-by to each other one evening at the little farm, oh how long ago it seems, you told me that you had tried again and again and were not able to pass the physical examination. In all this time you have never answered one of my letters and so I have thought of you at home caring for my place and your own. I knew that even if you did not care enough to write me, still you would never fail to do the favor I asked of you."

John Mallory was smiling at his nurse, the half-sad, half-quizzical smile she knew so well, having seen the same look on his face many times when they were children together.

"So you think I have not written you, Ouida, because I did not care for you? Did it ever occur to you that perhaps I cared too much to burden you with my disappointment? Anyhow, after you sailed to begin your Red Cross nursing aboard the

Consolation life at home became unendurable to me. I was hurt only slightly the night before you left and came back to the farm soon after. I tried to be content, I thought I could be content with the work I was doing; certainly a farmer's work seemed as important as any other, and yet I never forgot some of the things you said to me. I was not angry, my dear; you are one of the persons who can only speak the truth: But you had allowed me to know that you did not feel I was fitted for the soldier's life. I suppose I was not, nevertheless I have tried to do the next best thing. Don't put me on a pinnacle, Ouida, and think because you found me here in one of the hospital beds today along with the gallant fellows who have been fighting at Château-Thierry, that I am one of them. The United States government never thought I was strong enough to be a soldier, but at last I managed to persuade the Y. M. C. A. to allow me to work with them. My work has not been very heroic, dear, I have been cooking the greater part of the time since my arrival in France. It seemed

one of the things I could do better than the other fellows and no matter what else a soldier may be, he is nearly always hungry."

Louise Roberts laid her fingers on the young man's lips.

"I want to hear everything, everything that has happened to you since we separated, yet remember you said once I was a trained nurse before I was a human being. I am afraid the talking is tiring you too much."

Instead of replying John Mallory kissed the fingers that lay across his lips.

"What stupid and unkind things we used to say to each other, Louise, and perhaps would have gone on saying as long as we both lived, if no chance had come to us like this one. Why should I not tire myself by talking to you, since that is what I wish to do more than anything else in the world? Surely a fellow has a right to spend his last hours as he likes! You did not know who the patient was you were told had only a few hours to live and asked to take care of to the end. Yet I have an idea some one must have been looking after us, your

guardian angel or mine, else why should you have come to me rather than any other nurse? Let me talk on at least until I cannot speak and then I will give you a chance. This is like things used to be between us when we were children. It never was fair with us, was it, Ouida, to say the girl did the talking? But, dear, forgive me, it was unkind not to have answered your letter written after the sinking of the *Consolation* and telling me how your courage had failed at the end. If mine fails now in a little while you will be kinder to me, I know. I confess I thought it might be good for you to find out you were human like the rest of us. But, Louise, I was not cruel as I seemed. I said a little prayer of thanksgiving that you were saved and I meant to write you someday when I could prove to you I was not the weakling you believed me. Now—" the last few words came slowly and with a great effort, "Now, dear, I must give you a chance, I can't say anything more for the present."

But when John Mallory ceased to speak,

Louise Roberts also remained silent, watching the beautiful face on the pillow before her with a tenderness and sorrow in her dark eyes which all the years to come were never wholly to wipe away.

"You were cruel," she said a moment later. "You are cruel to me now, John. I have never in all my life thought the things about you which you were pleased to say I did, and yet you knew how hard it was for me to explain myself. You knew how it hurt me to seem so cold simply because I have never had the gift of expression. I haven't even got it now, dear, when I want you to understand me more than I shall ever wish anything as long as I live. I did not understand until we were apart how much your friendship had always meant to me. I know I was never half so charming as the other girls you know, and yet however much we quarreled, you always came back to me and made friends in the end."

The lips which answered Louise Roberts were white and even a little stiff and yet they kept their quality of an invincible humor.

"I wonder why I always came back, Ouida? Honestly, my dear, we were both of us very stupid. I have learned a good deal too since our separation, and I think perhaps what I learned was another reason why I could not write you. It is hard, dear, to write just a friendly letter, when there is so much, so much more one would like to say. Then you don't think I am a coward; I have wanted to hear you say it every minute I have been in France. Of course I can't appear like a hero to you when you think of what I have been doing, but remember the Boches had rather a special fancy for taking a shot at the cooks. I was pretty close up behind the line this morning ladling out coffee when they got me. It is a kind of funny ending, isn't it, Ouida? Remember what great things I used to tell you I was going to accomplish when we were kids together? How angry I was that you never would believe me!"

"And how wrong I was, dear, because now you have done them!" the girl answered. "Please don't forget that I also saw you do one of the bravest things

any man ever did the night after our farewell."

A little expression of displeasure crossed the sensitive face.

"To save a little child from a fire; that was hardly courage, Louise. If only you could have seen the boys I have seen in these past weeks, oh, I haven't any right even to speak of myself in the same breath with them! No, let me talk on, I am not in pain. Don't you know, there is nothing to hurt; both legs are gone? You must not be sorry, Ouida, for after all my effort to make you think I am a hero, I am a coward after all; I think I would rather go on the other side than stay on this if it is just the same to you, dear?"

That old habit of smiling over his deepest emotions, so characteristic of John Mallory, was not to desert him here at the close of his too brief life. Neither was Louise able to understand him any better than she had through her own too grave girlhood.

"But I do care, John, please don't talk as if I did not. I can't bear it. I want you."

Louise Roberts dropped her face close

down on the cot until it was hidden from sight, yet she could hear the voice speaking on, with the old note of raillery she was never to forget.

"Don't break down, Ouida dear, you know when we got into scrapes as children I used to do the crying and you kept up your courage for us both. You'll do it for me just once more, dear. Stay here by me and let us both be quiet. After a little I want to ask you a great favor. There is still one wonderful thing you can do for me, if it is not too hard."

So for a little time the two childhood friends kept silence.

They were in a hospital ward filled with the wounded, painful and unlovely sights and sounds were all about them, and yet curiously they were scarcely conscious save of each other, so strange a thing is love at a supreme moment.

Having taken a drug to ease his suffering John Mallory even slept a little. If, when he wakened it was with a little suppressed groan of pain, finding Louise still close beside him and looking at him as if her

eyes had never left the altar of his face, he would smile soon after.

“Didn’t I say I wanted you to do me a favor, Ouida? Well, don’t girls and women always do favors for sick men? I want you to marry me, dear, very soon, in the next half hour if you can. Don’t answer me, wait until I explain. If I were to live I would not ask you. I know you would marry me then, because as I would be an invalid all my days, you would have some one you could practice your nursing upon who could not escape. And I should hate it awfully. But you see, dear, what I really want is to have you look after my mother and father a bit in my place. They have no one you know except me and you have no people of your own. Besides, our big farm adjoins your little one and why should you not have both some day? It won’t hurt, you know, Ouida dear, if some day you want to take another husband. Men like widows—No, I don’t mean to hurt you, I scarcely know what I am saying. You must do what you wish; I have always taken advantage of you with my weakness.”

Louise Roberts whispered something which made the beautiful face on the pillow smile its unconquerable smile.

"Yes, I think I love you enough, dear, even if I were to live. I am not exactly sacrificing myself for your sake. I don't see just what you have to gain, except the burden of two people who will miss me but have you instead to take my place."

When Louise made a little movement to go away, John Mallory clung to her.

"Must you leave me even to get ready to marry me? Suppose I should turn coward while you are gone?"

But after all Louise did not go away for even five moments of bridal preparation. Glancing up to find some one to whom she could appeal she saw the Chaplain of the hospital making his way from one bedside to the other and talking to the soldiers who were able to speak to him.

The Rev. Howard Courtnay, having come abroad with Dr. David Clark, had been acting as Chaplain both at the hospital and farther afield, wherever his services were needed.

A few moments later, when Louise had explained her own and John Mallory's wish, he was standing beside them repeating the Episcopal marriage ceremony.

Nearby were Janet Perry and Sonya Clark, Louise's cousin and friend.

It seemed strange to Janet that Louise should marry before she did. But her own marriage to the Rev. Howard Courtnay had been postponed, as they both wished to come back to France to continue their war work and did not wish to interfere with the government regulations, which refused the wife the opportunity to serve her country abroad if her husband were in the service.

As soon as the ceremony was concluded, both Janet and Sonya returned to their own duties.

They had no choice, so many demands were being made upon them that even this brief time had been difficult to give.

The Chaplain was equally occupied, nevertheless he lingered a little to speak to John Mallory and to ask Louise to call him, if he were needed later on.

But Louise did not call him or any one else.

After a time her husband sank into his long sleep. Upon his lips was the smile which she had loved without understanding.

CHAPTER XVI

A Strange Meeting Place

WITHIN a limited space of time the village of Château-Thierry was again in the possession of the allied armies and the last phase of the great war begun. A second time the Marne had proved the grave of Kaiserism.

But all about the village and the surrounding country the bitterest battles of the war continued to be waged in the effort to drive the enemy out of the entire Rheims-Soissons salient.

During the hours of the fiercest fighting, Bianca Zoli and the little French girl, whom she had discovered so unexpectedly, remained hidden in the crypt of the old church. Twice outside portions of the building, struck by bombs, fell with a great crashing of ancient stones and mortar, yet the crypt remained uninjured.

How many hours they remained in

hiding neither of the girls was ever to know, then or afterwards; the time seemed interminable and yet the amazing fact was they were never disturbed. No stray soldier entered their refuge seeking safety, or searching for a renegade enemy.

It was difficult for Bianca and the little French girl to realize when the day came and when the night, since only a faint light filtered through the small gratings which served as windows. Yet always it was their ears and not their eyes which were registering impressions. When the tumult in the village was at its fiercest neither girl spoke or moved, although they kept close beside each other, the little French girl's hand clutching the folds of Bianca's dress, either because she wished to remember that she had human companionship, or because the uniform of a member of the Red Cross was in itself a source of strength and consolation.

Occasionally the fighting seemed to be taking place in the neighborhood of the old church then it swept on. However, the noise of the big guns rarely ceased and

there was seldom an intermission of any length between the explosions of giant shells.

Finally came an hour, whether in the day or night neither girl actually knew, when the sounds of the fighting close at hand grew less, when the shrieking of the shrapnel overhead died away, and there were longer intervals of time between the firing of the guns.

After this occurred both Bianca and the French girl fell asleep. Theirs was the sleep of utter nervous exhaustion, yet even in their sleep the girls were aware that they were now wrapped in a mysterious silence, which after the long tumult produced a sensation of emptiness, of remoteness, as if ears grown accustomed to dreadful noises listened vainly and tensely for the familiar clamor.

Later, when they awakened, the village of Château-Thierry, saved for France, had made immortal the name of the United States marines.

The two girls of course had no knowledge of this fact, only appreciating that the

fighting must have moved on further afield and unless there was a change in the order of the battle, the village was probably no longer in the immediate line of attack. Hourly such occasional firing as they still heard grew more and more distant.

Nevertheless, neither of the girls could guess whether the Germans or their own armies had been victorious.

It was the little French girl who made the first movement to leave the hiding place. Partly from hunger and partly from inaction, Bianca could feel herself sinking into a kind of torpor when she was aroused by an unexpected action. The French girl whom she had supposed in a far more exhausted condition than herself, was struggling to her feet. Thrusting out her hand she took hold of Bianca's and the older girl allowed herself to be guided down a long dark passage until through a small door at the end they came finally into the open street.

Bianca was not unconscious of the peril they both faced if the enemy should be in possession of Château-Thierry. At least

she had made up her mind that it was wiser to follow her companion to whatever fate might have in store for them than that they should die of starvation.

For an instant the light of the narrow village street, it must have been about midday, blinded both girls. Then Bianca observed that the tiny thoroughfare was possessed of a heavenly quiet.

Holding close to the French girl's hand she went with her to the end of the short street; it was as if one trod a pathway of ruin, though not all the houses were demolished.

In their brief pilgrimage there were other sights in the village streets from which both girls turned away their eyes.

At a corner Bianca Zoli paused, her face suddenly shining with rapture. At the same instant, with an exclamation of thanksgiving which was half a prayer, she pointed upward.

Near the center of the village, above what had once been the Hotel de Ville, floated the stars and stripes, together with the French tricolor.

The French girl, however, had been too terrorized to appreciate the full significance of what the two flags represented. Still holding Bianca's hand she drew her along until a few yards farther on they entered a house, which must have been one of the handsomest in the little French town.

It had been partly wrecked, but the girl seemed to know her way about without difficulty. The lower floor was not demolished, although it had been robbed of everything of value.

Going through, what must have been the dining-room, she entered a smaller room, and touching a secret spring in a side wall opened a door into a storehouse which had evidently been built with great care.

The storehouse contained a small amount of food.

A little later a United States marine officer who had been left in command of the village, accompanied by half a dozen marines, on a tour of inspection, discovered the two girls.

As Bianca insisted upon their having something to eat and prepared the meal

herself, she really opened the first American canteen in the reconquered village. On the day following a Red Cross unit arriving with stores of supplies for the soldiers who remained to guard the town, she joined the regularly organized group of workers.

A note written by Bianca and delivered at the hospital to Sonya Clark by the driver of a Red Cross ambulance, explained that she was well and extremely busy, but would return to the hospital in a few days; the note did not mention her recent adventures.

Standing in the Public Square in the village of Château-Thierry before its bombardment was a statue of the great French writer, La Fontaine, author of Fontaine's Fables, who was born and spent the greater part of his life in the little French town.

On the base of the statue a few lines are engraved from the fable known as "The Wolves and the Ewe:"

"Peace is all very well in itself I admit, but what use is it with enemies who are faithless?"

It was in the Public Square, not far from this monument, that the Red Cross canteen of which Bianca had become a member established itself.

Every day, following the taking of the village by American and French troops, a group of devoted American women and girls from early morning until late evening served soup and chocolate, coffee and cigarettes to weary and wounded soldiers, some of them passing through the village on the journey to the camps behind the line for a brief rest, others remaining to guard the village.

All about the Marne salient the flames of war still waged. The enemy had brought up large numbers of reserves and was making a stubborn defense both with artillery and machine guns. But always the news that came back to Château-Thierry these days was good news. On the twenty-first of July the 26th American Division was in possession of the Château-Thierry-Soissons road, two days later the 1st Division had reached the heights above Soissons and captured the village of Berzy-le-Sec.

Hundreds, in fact as time went on thousands, of German prisoners also marched through the village under small guards of soldiers or marines.

Because they also were hungry men who had at last laid down their arms, some of the German prisoners were also fed by the Red Cross workers. But, although no one observed the fact, Bianca Zoli refused to take any part in these acts of charity and mercy.

Her time and strength were sufficiently occupied in supplying so far as she could the needs of the allied soldiers.

In Bianca's mind was always the thought that the Germans had either taken Carlo Navara prisoner, or else he had been killed by them. Therefore, never so long as she lived could she in her heart be at peace with Germany.

It was one afternoon, rather late, when Bianca was standing in the big motor truck which had been adapted to serve the purposes of a traveling canteen, that she noticed a group of three or four marines walking toward the Public Square with perhaps a dozen or more German prisoners.

The soldiers were singing as they marched, and this afternoon they were singing the Marseillaise. This was not unusual; these days, however weary or hurt the conquering heroes might be, if there was any strength left in them, they were given to chanting this immortal hymn of France's first struggle for freedom.

But the fact which attracted Bianca's attention particularly on this afternoon was that the Americans were singing the French words and that their pronunciation of the French was not half so extraordinary as one usually heard.

The next moment and she realized why the singing was better than usual. A trained voice led the other voices.

Not only did the Americans, even the German prisoners marched more erectly to the swing and fervor of it.

"Allons, enfants de la patrie,
Le jour de gloire est arrivé!
Contre nous de la tyrannie——"

Suddenly Bianca's face flushed and her eyes filled with tears. How the voice

and the song brought back the memory of Carlo Navara! Yet had she not determined to work so unceasingly that she could have no time for regret?

The little company of men having observed the brave array of flags flying from the Red Cross canteen were now coming directly toward it.

Bianca began at once to ladle the chocolate she had just made into tin cups, assisted only by the little French girl who had never left her since the hour of their strange meeting.

She had on the same Red Cross costume, grown shabby and worn from the last few days of continuous service. Yet Bianca was one of the few fortunate persons able to preserve an air of exquisite neatness even under the most trying circumstances. Her head was uncovered in the warm late afternoon sunshine, her fair hair braided close to her small head. Her face was pale and a little haggard, but in spite of Bianca's emotion, she still retained that curiously cool, serene air which was inborn in her.

As the group of marines drew nearer, she

waved a small Red Cross flag toward them as a signal and an invitation.

Leaving two of their men to guard the German prisoners who showed no sign of wishing to give trouble, the others came toward the canteen.

Several of the girls went forward to greet them. Bianca climbed down out of the wagon and holding her tray of refreshments with great care followed a little shyly.

At the actual moment of meeting with strangers Bianca could never conquer her timidity.

She looked like a very modern Hebe, who in old mythological days, used to be known as "Cup Bearer to the Gods."

Yet Bianca very nearly destroyed the illusion by dropping her offering

Among the marines was one in odd apparel, which seemed to be an ill assorted collection of several uniforms, part of it German. Yet he was undoubtedly a United States marine, since he wore the helmet and coat, with the good conduct marine corps insignia, two broad bars of red with the blue bar in the center.

One arm was bandaged.

"Carlo," Bianca whispered under her breath.

Wheeling about in answer to his name, Carlo Navara managed to rescue the tray from Bianca's grasp with his one uninjured arm.

"Bianca," he answered.

But before continuing their conversation further, Carlo saw that Bianca's refreshments were delivered to his comrades, since spiritual emotions can sometimes be controlled for a longer space of time than physical hunger.

Afterwards, in the face of the entire company, Carlo came back and instead of grasping her hand as Bianca expected, he kissed her with entire gravity on both cheeks in the Latin fashion.

"Bianca, my one consolation through all these last days of Hades has been the thought that you were safe in Paris."

"But Carlo!"

It was Bianca's self-possession that now unexpectedly and completely deserted her.

Carlo was like a devoted brother and if in times past she had helped him through

difficult moments he was now screening her. He stood so that no one else could observe her, while Bianca explained: The trip back to Paris had been impossible. Yes, she had been in Château-Thierry during a part of the bombardment through an impossible mistake on her own part. But she had been quite safe. What the mistake was Bianca did not suggest. The point was would Carlo please tell where he had been for the past week or more? Had he been a German prisoner and if so how had he made his escape?"

Bianca poured forth her own story and her questioning in a torrent of words unlike her usual calmness and self-possession. The moment after Carlo slipped his uninjured arm through hers and together they walked a little distance away from the others.

"*Bianca mia,*" he said unexpectedly, using the Italian phrase so expressive of affection which Bianca until now had heard him bestow upon no one save Sonya, "it is like coming home to find you here in Thierry. To no one else do I ever wish to

confide the horror of the days I have just lived through, but to you upon whom I have always poured forth my woes. Afterwards let us never speak of them again. I *was* taken prisoner on the night I tried to get back to our line with Lieutenant Wainwright. The horror was what followed through the German effort to make me tell the secret we had risked more than our lives to find out. I managed to keep faith, Bianca, although I have always believed myself a coward. Still they did not wish to get rid of me altogether. Therefore when our own marines smashed the German front line, why I was taken prisoner by my own regiment. There is nothing more to tell except that I have been traveling this way slowly since, and have been treated with more kindness than I shall ever deserve."

Bianca touched the wounded arm lightly with the tips of her cool fingers.

Carlo smiled in response.

"It is nothing serious, Bianca dear, just a result of some of the torture I have been through. But it will be all right soon, and

I am always a lucky penny. I am now being sent to the Marine Hospital in charge of Dr. Clark, where Sonya herself will have a chance to care for me."

"Sonya," Bianca said a little wistfully, and then added:

"Will it always be Sonya with you, Carlo? I don't believe I shall want to go on now with the Red Cross canteen work here at Château-Thierry. There must be other more useful things I can do at the hospital."

It was not until a week later, when Bianca and Carlo were both again at the hospital, that Bianca told the complete story of her amazing journey into the town of Château-Thierry and the motive which inspired her action.

At the time she did not tell the story to Carlo Navara but to Sonya Clark, feeling a sense of embarrassment in allowing Carlo to know she had been deceived by so self-evident a fraud. Afterwards, Bianca had even appreciated the fact that the handwriting of the note was not Carlo's, but one with which she was entirely unfamiliar.

Notwithstanding, Bianca entreated Sonya not to regard the circumstance too seriously, for whatever the intent, personally she had no regret. Never so long as she lived could she cease to be grateful for her own presence in the little town during its hours of immortal history. The personal danger and discomfort she had suffered were as nothing compared to the happiness which followed with the coming of victory and the safe return of her friend. Besides, Bianca knew that through her experience she had gained an imperishable memory.

But Sonya did not view the situation in the same altruistic light. It was impossible to accept with calmness the idea that Bianca could have an enemy who wished her misfortune, without making an effort to discover whether the offender were a man or woman and what possible motive could lie behind so stupid and mischievous a deception.

As Sonya had no clue of any kind to work upon and was not able to ask her husband's aid, since he had no moment of time or energy to spare from his work,

naturally she confided Bianca's extraordinary story to her intimate friends among the Red Cross nurses, to Nona Davis and to both Barbara and Mildred Thornton.

In spite of the fact that the three girls confessed themselves as equally puzzled, Barbara had the curiosity to inquire if Bianca still had the note in her possession, and if so, might she be allowed to see it?

As Bianca had never thought of destroying the note, which was still in the pocket of her uniform where she had originally placed it, later, surrendering the note to Barbara, she dismissed the subject from her mind.

Days passed and apparently the circumstance was also equally forgotten by Bianca's friends, for even if it were possible to remember at the time, there was no moment to give to the solution of the mystery with other more important tasks absorbing one.

In reality it was several weeks before Barbara Thornton had the least justification for a suspicion which originally came to her with Sonya's recounting of Bianca's

story. At the time the suspicion was nothing more than an intuition and not founded upon any reasonable grounds.

Yet, although Barbara discussed her idea with no one and made no open effort to reach any worth while solution of the mystery, nevertheless, possessed of a curious streak of obstinacy, she clung to her first point of view.

Then, quite by accident, she discovered the vindication of her intuition in unmistakable proof. The circumstances were casual and curious and to any one less keen than Barbara Thornton might have passed unobserved. Yet one must take into consideration the fact that Barbara had continued to hold Bianca's note in her own keeping and many times had made a careful study of it.

One day, hurrying down the hall of the hospital, intending to place a belated letter she had written to her husband in the mail bag before it was borne away, Barbara was suddenly interrupted by Anne Karen who called to her:

"Please, Mrs. Thornton, would you mind

mailing several letters of mine along with your's? I am so busy just at present I can't leave my patient even for a moment."

And Barbara of course had cheerfully agreed.

But by mistake Anne Karen had thrust into her hands, not only the two letters which she had finished writing and sealed and addressed, but an odd sheet of paper upon which she had written a portion of a letter, and not having completed had failed to place in an envelope.

When Barbara observed this fact there was no time to return the letter until the others were safely mailed. But a few moments later coming back with the sheet of paper in her outstretched hand, it occurred to Barbara that Anne Karen's handwriting was oddly familiar and yet she never recalled having seen it before. An instant later her former suspicion reappeared.

Barbara was troubled by no hesitation. Bearing the unfinished note to her room she at once made a careful comparison between this and Bianca's crumpled and childish epistle.

Afterwards to Barbara's own mind no further verification was necessary.

But this might not have been sufficient proof in itself and might have failed to convince other persons, had not Anne herself preferred, in the face of Barbara's accusation, to make a full confession. It was her defense that she only had intended annoying Bianca and had not dreamed that the younger girl would be deceived. But even accepting the idea that Bianca might have been deceived, no one could have imagined she would undertake to answer the appeal which the note contained.

In her confession which she made later in the presence of Bianca and Sonya, upon Barbara Thornton's insisting that they also appear as witnesses, Anne explained the enigma of Bianca's receipt of the note. Having written it in a moment of mischievous idleness she had gone out for a walk and later given it to a marine, a stranger whom she had met in passing, who was walking in the direction of the canteen where Anne knew Bianca to be at work. The young man was in no degree re-

sponsible, having no knowledge of what information the note contained, except that Anne had deliberately fostered the impression that the news was of such a character that Bianca would wish to receive it at once.

In making her confession Anne displayed a great deal of penitence, begging Bianca's pardon in an apparently contrite frame of mind and protesting that she had been sufficiently punished by her anxiety when Bianca failed to return to the hospital at the usual time.

Bianca even agreed to forgive her, although Bianca's forgiveness was of the kind one bestows upon the sins of human beings for whom one has neither respect nor affection.

Sonya, however, refused to share any such attitude, her position being that Anne was too old, her responsibility as a Red Cross nurse too grave to allow of such childlike maliciousness. Frankly, Sonya announced that as soon as the opportunity offered, Anne would be sent back to the United States.

No one else was informed of her conduct save Dr. Clark and Miss Blackstone, the superintendant of nurses, but a month later without further discussion, Anne was ordered home.

CHAPTER XVII

The Finale

DURING many weeks to follow, through the long summer time and early autumn, the work at the Marine Hospital behind the lines continued with unabated zeal. But although the wounded soldiers were as numerous as at any period during the great war and their sufferings as intense, nevertheless a wholly different spirit possessed the wounded as well as the men and women devoted to their care.

Victory was in the air, victory for the Allies and no man could say whether the victory was due to the genius and unconquerable valor of the French, to the pertinacity and resources of the British, the gallantry and zeal of the Italians, or to the new forces of idealism and fighting ability which the American troops brought into the last great deal in the ancient game of

war. There were even persons fair enough to remember that Russia had saved the day at the beginning of the world war with Germany and that her five million soldiers had not died in vain.

Whatever the cause, the Germans had continued their retreat from the first day of Marshal Foch's counter-offensive, yielding to the French, American and Italian troops in the south of France, to the United States marines and National Army at Château-Thierry and in the St. Mihiel salients and to the British further north. The counter-offensive from the enemy for which the world waited never materialized; in its place came plaintive pleas from Austria and Turkey for the peace which could come in no other way than through ultimate surrender.

Then came a November day at the hospital at Château-Thierry.

The fighting line having been pushed further and further toward the enemy's country, for several weeks few recently wounded soldiers had been brought to the hospital. Now the little villages in Flan-

ders and Picardy, and those along the Marne, the Meuse, the Aisne and the Somme were being reinhabited by the returning French families who had been refugees in their own land.

Therefore, upon this November day there was but little suggestion of sorrow and tragedy about the hospital. The camouflage employed as a safeguard having been removed, the old stone château, built a century or more ago, waved from its square battlement the Red Cross flag of universal humanity.

In spite of the coolness of the afternoon the grounds surrounding the hospital building were filled with soldiers and marines, being wheeled about in chairs, or else seated in groups discussing the only question of importance in the world on this particular afternoon. A few of them were walking about with chosen companions and with no appearance of invalidism.

With no look of having passed through an exceptionally dangerous ordeal, save for the slight scar at one side of his head, a young marine officer came down the few

stone steps at the front of the hospital and stood as if waiting for some one.

A little later a girl in the white uniform of a Red Cross nurse, but wearing a long coat joined him and together they started along a path which led to the edge of a woods not far away.

"I feel as if I were playing truant, Lieutenant Wainwright, but Mrs. Clark has volunteered to undertake my responsibilities this afternoon so that we may have a final talk together. Mrs. Clark is much more successful with the convalescent patients than I can ever succeed in being. Selfish as it may sound, I am sorry you are returning home and yet I know if I had been awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor I should wish to display it to as large an audience of my own countrymen as possible."

On the winter field overcoat of forestry green, which the young lieutenant of marines was wearing, hung a medallion, the shield field of blue with stars, suspended by a pin with an eagle, marked "Valor" then below the word a star, the head of

a warrior, with "U. S. of A." and a laurel wreath.

With the closing of Mildred Thornton's speech the young officer made a movement as if he intended to withdraw the medal from its resting place.

"If things were altogether fair in this world, Miss Thornton, this honor would have been bestowed upon you and not upon me. But, although it can be but a small satisfaction to you, please realize that I know I would never have lived to receive the medal save for you."

Mildred laughed.

"Lieutenant Wainwright, a speech like that, as far as it is from the truth, is all the reward a nurse can ever desire. All I did for you was to have a little more faith than other people."

"The faith that removes mountains," Lieutenant Wainwright quoted. "Well, at least you and I have a common secret, so that I can hope for that reason, if for no other, you will never forget me. Please do not think I am alone in my point of view. If it is wiser that we seldom discuss the

subject, nevertheless Colonel Winfield asked me to say to you that the world owes more to your judgment and devotion than it will ever know or repay. If you had not realized the value of the message I was able to entrust to you, if you had not repeated it exactly—ah, well, it is hardly worth while to guess what may or may not have happened in the face of the great fact that peace may come now at any hour.”

The November sun was shining palely on the late autumn woods. Above the bare branches of the trees a white mist swam, folding them in a light veil. On this afternoon of the 10th of November, 1918, it was known that the German envoys were with Marshal Foch and at any moment would agree to the terms of the armistice.

Mildred Thornton, to whom the expression of emotion was difficult, stopped for a moment extending her beautiful capable hand toward the young American officer.

“May we say our farewell now? I don’t think it wise to go any further into the woods as the sun will soon be down. I

wonder if you remember as well as I do our meeting and farewell at my home in New York? You will be good enough to go to see my mother and father after you land. Tell them I shall be coming back home now as soon as my services are no longer needed over here. It may seem strange to you, Lieutenant Wainwright, but lately with peace so near, I have been thinking of what I shall do with my life, when my days as a Red Cross nurse are past. I wonder if it is my duty to try to lead the society life my mother wishes me to lead and my father's position makes possible. I am afraid I shall never be so happy in it as I have been as a Red Cross nurse, strange as this speech must sound. Yet it has meant so much to me to be of use. I feel sometimes that perhaps nursing is my real mission and that I would like to go on with it always."

The young officer had not relinquished Mildred's hand while she made her long speech and made no effort to surrender it at the present moment, even though she made a gentle effort to withdraw it from his grasp.

"There is a mission I wish you could make up your mind you would like to undertake, Mildred," the young officer answered, with a gravity greater than the girl's had been. "I have tried to speak of it to you several times, but you have never been willing to listen. I want you to devote yourself to caring for me, oh, not in the physical way in which you have succeeded so admirably, but with all the affection and all the sweetness and all the power of which you are capable. No one knows as I do what this would mean, because, my dear, I care so much for you. Surely you have put aside the things of the past, your engagement to General Alexis of which some one told me. Even if the great soldier were still alive I believe you would realize that you and I have a closer bond than you could ever have had with a man of so different an age and faith than your own."

Mildred Thornton could never be beautiful, yet as nearly as beauty was possible to her, she appeared at this moment.

Her gray eyes were very deep and

shadowy, her thin face softly flushed, the wide lips curved into a smile of unaccustomed radiance. Yet womanlike she hesitated to grasp the beauty and fulfilment that was so generously offered her.

"But isn't it because you are grateful to me that you think you love me?" Mildred inquired, face to face with the unfaith that trembles before the high sacrament of love. "Will it not be wiser for us to wait until you are entirely yourself, until you can be more sure——"

If Lieutenant Wainwright at times seemed to have as serious a nature as Mildred's own, at others he possessed the saving grace of humor which she lacked.

"No, Mildred, my dear, I do not think we should wait for any unfaith or any change of heart on your part or my own, so sure I am that our future happiness depends on each other I don't mean to give fate the opportunity to divide us if I can avoid it. Remember, dear, the motto of the Marine Corps, '*Semper Fidelis*,' always faithful, suppose we make this the motto of our lives?"

And quite without protest from Mildred, who utterly forgot her duties as a Red Cross nurse for a time, Lieutenant Wainwright drew her arm through his and walked with her into the heart of the November woods.

It was nearly the supper hour when returning to the hospital, Mildred slipped away from her companion toward the comparative seclusion of the room she shared with several other of the hospital nurses.

In the long nun-like chamber she was fortunate to find only Nona Davis, and a Nona with shining eyes and a face whose happiness equaled her own.

Indeed Nona did not at first observe any change in Mildred, so eagerly did she desire a confidant.

"Mildred dear, the American mail has come and there are a number of letters for you," she began. "But before you read them won't you congratulate me? I have just had a letter from Captain Martin and he writes me there is more than a fair chance he may be able to see again. At least he must be pretty sure of the fact

since he at last has the grace to acknowledge our engagement and suggests we be married as soon as I can arrange to come back to the United States. This is a good deal from a gentleman who has so long refused to consider my efforts to marry him against his will. Dear old Jack, I mean to go back home as soon as I can be spared! Peace and my own happiness to come at so nearly the same time! It is a wonderful new world, Mildred, I can only hope some day you may be equally happy."

Then as Mildred stood silent, but smiling at the other girl, something of her own secret was revealed.

It was later in the evening, after supper was finished, when, with Sonya's special permission, Carlo Navara and Bianca Zoli went out of the hospital for a short walk.

Down by the gate which led into the hospital grounds two lanterns were lighted, lanterns which in times past had guided the ambulances seeking the hospital with their burden of wounded and dying.

Bianca and Carlo walked slowly down the roadway.

"How strange it is to find the night so silent and peaceful! I have not yet grown accustomed to the silence," Bianca murmured. "Yet Dr. Clark tells me the fighting is continuing and will continue until the last moment when the armistice is signed. Of course a girl does not understand, but the last sacrifices of war will be the hardest to bear because they do not seem necessary. Still Carlo, I feel we have many reasons to be grateful, so many of the wounded here at our hospital have recovered, or at least they are recovering. And you, you are sure you are perfectly well?"

"I did not ask you to take a walk with me, Bianca, to discuss my health," Carlo answered with ingratitude. "But if you wish to know, of course I am all right and have been for so long that my presence in the hospital is a sheer imposition. I am sure it is due to Sonya's influence that I have been allowed to remain here so long. Just the same I rejoice with all my heart to be in France when peace is declared. The country that has borne the greatest burden

of the war must at the close enjoy the greatest happiness. How difficult it is tonight to speak of any other subject." Here Carlo's voice changed suddenly.

"But, Bianca, it is not peace but war I wish to discuss with you. Let me tell you, my dear, that if we have played at being brother and sister in times past and I have endured a good deal of excellent advice from you, at last my hour has arrived! You are too much of a child in the first place, Bianca. And besides, my dear, before things go any further between you I feel I ought to tell you that Captain Preston is a very gifted and daring aviator, but that does not prevent his having a reputation as a man, which makes him an impossible friend for you, Bee dear. And yet the fellow has been over here any number of times recently with the slimmest possible excuses for his visits. Is it very much for me to ask of you to have nothing more to do with him? You are so young, Bee, in spite of being the oldest and wisest of persons under other circumstances."

If Carlo's voice and manner had been

fierce and unrelenting at the beginning of his speech, it had melted now to the sheerest friendliness at the close.

But Bianca was not pleased.

"I wish you would not be so absurd, Carlo," she answered. "I like Captain Preston even less than you do. In any case his calls are not made to me but to Miss Karen and I don't think either you or I are called upon to chaperon her. As a matter of fact, Carlo, though I understand you intend being kind, it really is not necessary for you to act as my guardian. Sonya is capable of assuming all the responsibility and authority necessary, and Sonya in your estimation you know can do no wrong."

"Sorry you are cross, Bee," Carlo answered nonchalantly. "Just the same I am pleased enough with the news you tell me to endure being snubbed. But you are right in my estimation of Sonya. I shall go back to my art now and work at it as I never have worked before. Some day perhaps I may be a really great singer, Bianca, and then you will be proud of your brother.

But always I shall carry the image of Sonya with me. We were talking together last night and she told me that oftentimes a great artist, such as she was good enough to say I would be, needed a woman friend more than any other man. There were more temptations in his life, perhaps greater weakness. And because she was so much older Sonya told me she would like to be my dear friend, always."

"Then you never mean to marry, Carlo?"

The young soldier-artist laughed.

"That no man can safely say. But Bianca, if you will forgive my interference of a few moments ago this much I promise. Never shall I marry unless you are present at my wedding."

Later when Bianca and Carlo reached the gate they stood there together for a few moments Carlo slipping his hand inside Bianca's as if they were two friendly children.

They did not at first see Sonya and her husband approaching. They had been for a longer walk and were now returning to the hospital together.

"Peace will be declared at dawn tomorrow, Sonya, at least I have every reason to think so and have given orders for the ringing of whatever bells we can find. But I think we will hear the rejoicing from all over France. Well, you and I have given the best that was in us to the great cause of human freedom. I wish my best had been better, but that no one can accomplish."

"And I have been sorry to have been a disappointment to you as a nurse, David," Sonya replied. "But at least I know you have understood that I have failed because I do not seem to have the nurse's gift, not because I have not tried."

"What are you saying, Sonya? Failure?" Dr. Clark repeated. "Is it failure to serve as the friend and comforter of every wounded boy whom your sympathy could reach. My dear, if I were called upon to judge the one person in our hospital whose services have been of the greatest value,—but then I am not called upon to judge and no one would accept my opinion of you if I were. Sonya, sometimes I have won-

dered if I have done you an injustice to have married you because I wanted you so much, rather than for more unselfish reasons. That beautiful, gifted boy——”

Dr. Clark had suddenly caught sight of Carlo and Bianca standing together only a few yards away so that his speech broke off abruptly.

But Sonya only laughed, pressing her cheek for a moment against her husband's sleeve.

“How much nicer it is for you to be jealous of me, David, than that I should be a jealous wife! But please don't be so ridiculous as to think of a boy who might have been my son. See, there is my dream, Bianca and Carlo. They must both grow up first, however, Bianca in years, and Carlo in the things that make a man, if an artist is ever a grown-up man.”

Then Sonya waved her hand and called to them and together the four stood resting and looking up toward the sky.

In the neighborhood of Château-Thierry the night of November 10th was clear and cold. In the high arch of the sky the stars shone with a peculiar brilliancy.

Suddenly Sonya made a movement with her hand pointing upward.

Toward the east, showing plainly in the sky, was a great white cross.

It seemed to be made of white mist with a single star immediately above it.

Then Sonya quoted softly:

"Now when Jesus was born in Bethelhem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem saying, where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we saw his star in the east and are come to worship him."

And Carlo answered with quick sympathy.

"At last he has come into his own, the Prince of Peace."

